

THE SPORT OF KINGS



BY
W. SCARTH
DIXON



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THE SPORT OF KINGS

By the same Author

IN THE NORTH COUNTREE

Annals and Anecdotes of Horse,
Hound, and Herd

By W. SCARTH DIXON.

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In Preparation

NORTH COUNTRY SPORTSMEN

By W. SCARTH DIXON

LONDON: GRANT RICHARDS

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Yours faithfully
William Leach Dixon

THE *Buckden 1902*
SPORT OF KINGS —

BY

WILLIAM SCARTH DIXON

AUTHOR OF

'IN THE NORTH COUNTRY,' 'THE HISTORY OF THE BRAMHAM MOOR HUNT,'
'THE HISTORY OF THE YORK AND AINSTY HUNT,' ETC.

London

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1900

Manhod I am, therefore I me delyght
To hunt and hawke, to nourish up and fede
The greyhounde to the course, the hawke to th' flyght,
And to bestryde a good and lusty sted ;
These thynges become a very man in dede.—SIR THOMAS MORE.

The love of sport is but another form of the love of Nature.

D. H. MADDEN.

There is no sport so conducive to health, so bracing to the nerves, and
that gives such a good tone to the stomach as fox-hunting.

WILL GOODALL

(Letter to Sir Thomas Whichcote).

PREFACE

My thanks are due to the Proprietors of *Country Sport*, for whom the bulk of the articles which make up this book were written, for leave to reproduce them. They have been in some instances rewritten, and an occasional chapter has been added, but practically they are given in the same form as they originally appeared.

As they met with the kind approval of many of my hunting friends, I venture to express the hope that they may please when presented in book form.

I should add that, though I have carefully refrained from giving names, the anecdotes which I relate actually took place as I relate them, and most of them under my own eyes. In the other cases they were told to me by eye-witnesses.

WILLIAM SCARTH DIXON.

YORK, *October* 1899.

INTRODUCTION

A FEW words seem to be necessary to explain the scheme of this book, if scheme indeed it may be said to have. When originally written as newspaper articles, it is obvious that each subject was selected as the occasion might demand. One week "Hunting Etiquette" might be the subject ; the next "Earth-Stopping" or "Digging-Out," or "The Runner" or "The Hunting Parson" might occupy the attention of my readers. It seems scarcely necessary to say that such plan, or want of plan, would be utterly out of place in a book, and the question necessarily arose as to what was the best way to classify the material I had at command. After some consideration I decided that it would be best to so arrange them as to describe the hunting man's year, and I have accordingly adopted that plan so far as is possible.

It is hoped that, whilst the hunting man who is to the manner born may find some entertainment in these pages, the tyro will also find some useful lessons conveyed. But let not either think that the subject is exhausted. The subject of hunting is indeed inexhaustible. New methods are every now and again adopted, and though the great principles of the craft which are laid down by Blome and Beckford are still maintained in

their integrity, there are constantly variations springing up which call for remark and, perhaps, criticism. Hunting is ever fresh and new, and though I have now entered on my forty-first hunting season, I have, I hope, learned something worth knowing since I saw hounds for the first time this season at Venniford Post. I would impress upon the man with limited hunting experience that he ought to learn something about the sport that he loves every day that he is out. And he will learn something every day if he keeps his eyes open and thinks.

It has been thought best to make the hunting year start with an account of puppy walking, for without the young hounds being well and carefully walked, sport would soon be at a discount. Besides which I know of nothing which gives greater pleasure to the true sportsman than to see the hound he has walked running at the head of the pack. The training of the hunter, the chase of the wild red deer, the long exercise, and the earlier days of cub-hunting follow each other by natural succession. Subjects incidental to fox-hunting when the season is in full swing are then considered, and "April Hunting on the Moors," "Hunter Breeding," and "The Future of Fox-Hunting" come in for notice, whilst there is a chapter on Peterborough Hound Show, which well marks the boundary between one season and another.

W. S. D.

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CHAPTER I

THE ATTRACTIONS OF FOX-HUNTING

Age cannot wither, nor custom stale
Its infinite variety.

THE distinguishing feature of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom is the love of sport. On moor and loch, by the side of sluggish stream or the foaming current, amongst the turnips and stubbles, or by the woodside when the leaves are falling and the pheasants are rocketing, the votaries of rod and gun are to be found, as the season comes round, busily engaged in the sport they chiefly affect. If a man cannot afford a trip to Norway, or a salmon river in Scotland, he is content with what coarse fishing comes in his way, and in his dreams only does he hear the mighty rush of *Salmo salar*. Or if the gun should be his sport, though the moors may not be attainable, he manages to put in some happy hours amongst the partridges, and even if these be but few, *Lepus cuniculus* affords rare sport when in the humour for bolting. An excellent sportsman of my acquaintance had taken a game certificate for thirty years before he had an opportunity of shooting a grouse. At last the opportunity came, and as he

is a fine shot, he acquitted himself well, and he thinks and talks more about those ten brace of grouse which fell to his gun than of all the excellent days' sport he had seen throughout his thirty years' experience. To him those grouse will always be as fresh as they were when the thud, thud, thud of their bodies on the moor brought music to his ear.

And as every season brings its pleasures, so does the fox-hunting season bring the greatest pleasure of all. There may be some—as a matter of fact, there are some—who soon drop out of the ranks of fox-hunters, men who perhaps go well for two or three seasons, and then, either from loss of nerve or from self-indulgence, or from giving way to the enticements of her whom Horace so aptly styles “the Siren Sloth,” give up hunting altogether. But even they, I fancy, have their moments of regret when they see “the glad throng that rides laughing along,” or when they hear of a gallant run over a country in which they once showed to advantage.

It is not with the man who hunts for a season or two, and then gives up of his own accord, that I have to deal. Whatever may have been his motive in taking to the sport—and bear in mind that no man can take to fox-hunting from a bad or selfish motive, for hunting is essentially a social sport—he has never really had the genuine love of hunting in him. It is the man to the manner born, for *nascitur non fit* applies to the fox-hunter as it does to poet, painter, and gentleman, who sees in the sport of kings an infinite variety; to whom, in his sere old age, hounds and their doings excite as keen an interest as in his eager youth.

And however good a man he may be with rod or gun, however great may be his skill with the cricket bat—in a word, however good an all-round sportsman he may be, the first of November will be the red-letter day in his calendar, and it is on his hunting experiences that he will dwell the longest and the most lovingly. The old squire of whom Rogers writes so beautifully, shot and fished and played cricket no doubt, but we read :—

The fox's brush still emulous to wear,
He scoured the country in his elbow chair.

And old Tom Sebright on his deathbed seeing “old Bluecap, and Shiner, and Bonny Lass wagging her stern” is one of the most pathetic incidents in the history of sport.

One great reason for the hold which hunting has upon its true votaries is its freshness. History repeats itself is a truism, but equally true as the truism is it that history repeats itself less frequently in the hunting field than elsewhere. This may, to the uninitiated, seem an exaggeration ; to the man who knows hunting thoroughly it is nothing but the plain, unvarnished fact. “What,” says the critic, “you have talked of that run which you had from Hornblower Hazels, in which hounds ran hard for forty-five minutes, and killed their fox, and then you say that three weeks afterwards you had just such another run, from the same place, going field by field, and killing within a field of where you killed your first fox. How do you make out that history does not repeat itself here ?” Well, history partially repeats itself, and only partially. The line of the runs was exactly the same, or so nearly the same it is not worth

arguing about the minute difference which was between them, yet to each individual with eyes to see, who rode in those runs, the incidents of the chase were as different as possible. Truly, they were galloping over the same ground, but they were doing more than that—they were hunting a fox. Just listen for a moment to what that good sportsman, my friend Mr. X. Y. Z., has to say about these two runs. “Yes,” says he, speaking of the first run, “that was a real good gallop from Hornblower Hazels. Hounds got right on the top of their fox, and never gave him a chance of a turn in covert. They ran hard for twenty-five minutes, and then Farmer Jones’s sheep caused a check. Harry was casting them, when he viewed fox, clapped hounds close at his brush, and in another quarter of an hour they rolled him over. I got fairly away, and was in a fair good place, but did not see quite so much of hounds’ work as I liked. You see, Bouncer came down at the brook, and interfered with me a bit. Oh! the last run was the best, certainly; at least, from my standpoint, though I’m not saying anything against the other. You see, our fox was well on his legs this last time, and had got half way over the second field before Harry had them settled to their work. Then they did go, my word! It was like a steeplechase. I got a nailing start, and took care that I was not balked at the brook this time. Hounds ran on for half an hour at top pace, and then came a most unlooked-for check. Hounds spread like a fan, and then Ruby hit off the line down a dry ditch, which the fox had run down for about a couple of hundred yards, and away we went again as hard as ever. You know, Ruby was always a

favourite of mine, and I did shout, 'Look at Ruby now,' as she streamed along two or three lengths in front of the pack. Ten minutes more, and they had him. The check did not let many up, and few saw the fine point which Ruby made. Oh! there can be no comparison as to which was the best run." Quite right, my friend, X. Y. Z., and if the critic answers that only the few men who ride in the very first flight can see these things, I reply that very often the very first flight men do not see what takes place under their very eyes, and that many a man who has no pretensions to being a "bruiser" sees more of the hound work than the man who gallops and jumps, and has no time for anything else.

Take Slocum, for instance. In his best days he was never what the late Mr. George Lane Fox would have called a "thrusting scoundrel." If a big place came in his way he would jump it, but he preferred a little one, and in a very few years he preferred a line of gates. But he did not give up; not he. As then so now, he hunts his four and sometimes five days a week, and finds time to do a good deal of useful work besides. His knowledge of woodcraft and knowledge of country are exceptionally good, and it is good to bet on that he will see most of the fun without riding in the first flight. In a racing burst of twenty minutes, of course, he is not seen to advantage, but given a run, however fast it may be, it is a slight shade of odds that Slocum is there at the critical moment, and should it happen, as it does sometimes, that the huntsman is not quite with his hounds, owing to an unlucky turn or a fall, it is to Slocum that that worthy appeals for

information, and it is on Slocum's information he acts.

Now, Slocum is a sensible man, his opinion is courted on important matters, and it stands to reason that Slocum would not make the sacrifices he does to secure his hunting—and he does make sacrifices—if it were not for the “infinite variety” that there is in the sport which he affects, and of which he is a distinguished ornament.

For those who go out cub-hunting, who have time and opportunity, and who have so far secured the huntsman's confidence as to receive intimation of the earliest cub-hunting fixtures, the charm of hunting, its interest and its variety, is much increased. To begin with, the man who has such a privilege is a hound man, or he would not be there. The man who merely hunts to ride would never take the trouble to rise a little after midnight to meet hounds at dawn, and not have a gallop. But to the man who appreciates hounds and their work, and who knows the history of the pack, what pleasure there is in those September mornings! What a delight in watching how old Druid's progeny are entering to their game, and growing each morning cleverer and cleverer, till they bid fair soon to be nearly as good as their wise old sire himself. And as the season wears on each day brings with it its own peculiar charm. Even from a blank day an observant man can learn something of the denizens of the woods. But the man who stands by the covert side, discussing volubly local gossip, foreign politics, or “the swearing of De Grin,” sees none of these things, and to him one blank day only differs from another in the coverts that are drawn.

I remember once being out at the latter end of the season with a famous pack. We had drawn covert after covert without a sign of a fox. Then we drew a spinney of some twenty or thirty acres. There was not much undergrowth, but it was easy to see by those who would take the trouble to look that there had been a fox there. Hounds could not speak to the line, they could not own it in any way, but there was a special alertness about them, which said as plainly as words, "Our friend has been about some time, not so long since." There was a large wood a field off, and our huntsman drew his hounds out of the spinney very quietly, and slipped along to that wood. Some of us went into the wood ; the bulk of the field rode outside. People were talking as usual, and said there was no fox there, but it was, to those who looked, easy to see the hounds were getting keener and keener. In the middle of the wood one or two feathered, and then in a fraction of a second they flew together, like a man clapping his hands, and opening all at once, drove on at a rare pace. We had a good run, and we killed our fox, but the best part of that run was the find. I have hunted more seasons than I quite care to talk about, but I never saw such a perfect find as that. And it is in such apparently little things as these that the great charm of hunting lies. Never do exactly similar circumstances take place. There is a constant freshness of incident, which doubtless exists in other sports, but in none in so remarkable a degree as it does in fox-hunting.

Perhaps a word may be devoted to our critics. We fox-hunters have been called "red-coated

ruffians" by morbid humanitarians. It is a compliment to be called names by such apologies for men, and for their criticisms we need only care so far as it is necessary to protect our sport from their insidious attacks. The morbid humanitarian on the war-path is a creature devoid of scruples ; he is insidious in his attack ; he is persevering ; but he is *not* dangerous if he be opposed thoroughly. His chance is that he is despised by the good men and true against whom he is working, and he makes the most of his chance. In season and out of season he should be opposed, and whatever he may bring forward, it behoves sportsmen to see that there is no attack against sport hidden under his scheme, for, like the famous J. B., he is "sly, sir, devilish sly."

The charge of cruelty against fox-hunters has been brought again and again by these humanitarians, but they never make good their case. There is a story told of a hunting man, who, when assailed as to this side of his favourite sport, said, "Why, everything likes hunting ; I like it, the horse likes it, the hounds like it, and I verily believe the foxes like to be hunted." Here is the same thought, which, of course, the supercilious humanitarian turns up his virtuous nose at, expressed in different words—the words of a great man, whose name will live for ever in the history of his country. He imagines a fox addressing the humanitarians after the abolition of fox-hunting :—

"Formerly we were allowed six months in the year to gain our livelihood and bring up our families in quiet ; many of us, it is true, were destroyed in the course of the winter, but that was the fortune of war, and the enemy did not

beat up our quarters more than half a dozen times in the whole year. Upon the whole, we lived a pleasant life—short and disturbed perhaps, but safe from trap and gun, and in the midst of plenty ; but now that you have interfered with your humanity, there has come out a general order to shoot and destroy us wherever we may be found, till our ancient family is exterminated. And this is out of your special kindness ! ”

Such is the opinion of that great statesman Lord John Russell, and the thanks of all his brother sportsmen are due to Sir Herbert Maxwell for tracing the authorship of that eloquent and truly sensible passage. I cannot do better than conclude by commending Lord John Russell’s words to all, friends and enemies of sport alike, and to wish the former all sorts of good luck

When they meet once again,
Though it sleet or it rain,
For the sport that is always new.

CHAPTER II

HUNTING A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

So sang the late Poet Laureate, and the lines may be as fitly applied to hunting as to anything else which is affected by what is known euphuistically as the march of civilisation. Hunting is perforce conducted differently from what it was in the days when George III. was king, and, in some respects, at any rate, it can scarcely be said to have improved, whilst in others it has, to use another euphuism, "marched with the times." Nowadays hounds run faster, they are more level and sorty, and there are more men who ride hard and straight, but the old days were good days, and in many respects we might follow the example of our ancestors, who, whatever were their faults, could not be looked upon as feather-bed sportsmen.

There cannot be a greater blunder than that which is sometimes, nay, frequently, made by writers who have little practical knowledge of hunting, to the effect that until comparatively recent times hunting men were destitute of refinement. Squire Western is held up by them as the type of every hunting squire who lived prior to

quite recent times, and they quote the fox-hunters' orgy in Thomson's "Seasons" as an accurate description of how the hunting world went then. It may be urged with justice that Thomson and Fielding wrote more than a hundred years ago, and that therefore the hunting man of a hundred years ago is not affected by what they wrote. It can, moreover, be stated without fear of contradiction that more than a hundred years ago fox-hunting was

Pastime for princes, prime sport of our nation,
and that men of refinement and education joined in the sport as freely as they do in these days. The social customs of a hundred years ago were, of course, different from what they are now, a different standard of manners prevailed, and it is as unfair to sneer at fox-hunting because of the vulgarities of Squire Western as it would be to disparage literature on account of the eccentricities of Henry Fielding himself.

A hundred years ago hunting was principally confined to country gentlemen, well-to-do farmers, and, perhaps, the parson and the village doctor, who resided within the limits of the hunt; though, of course, even in those days, Melton was a fashionable resort, and the Shires were beginning to be looked upon as the desideratum of the hunting man. But it may be laid down as an absolute fact that in and about the year 1796 nearly all men hunted from home, and that when our forefathers went to hunt the fox,

In broad lapped coat, top boots, black cap, and a pigtail
sticking out,
they probably knew every man over whose land

they were about to ride. Consequently, as they were living and hunting amongst their friends and neighbours, as there were comparatively few of them, and, consequently, damages were limited, there was none of that friction with the farmers which now unhappily exists in some countries where large fields of strangers bruise along entirely regardless of the damage they do, and perhaps with scarcely a civil word for the remonstrant occupier of the soil, who is righteously grieved at needless mischief.

In the good old days gorse coverts, as we know them, were so scarce as to be practically non-existent, foxes were also scarcer and worse to find, so an entirely different style of hunting was necessary. To begin with, it was essential to make an early start in order that the drag might not be too stale. For, instead of waving hounds into a gorse covert or wood, as is now the case, it was imperative that the overnight drag of the fox should be hit upon and that he should be hunted up to his kennel. So daybreak was the usual hour of meeting, and hounds proceeded to try the open commons and moors, which then prevailed to a greater extent than they do now. A drag is hit upon, hounds at first perhaps can barely own it, and the huntsman's watchful eye is needed to prevent them running heel. All goes well, however, the drag grows warmer and warmer, they will find him immediately, for the occasional notes of a wise and fine-nosed old hound have for some minutes gradually been swelling into a chorus. They must be close to his kennel now. See, there he is! and now opening all together hounds settle down to their work in grim earnest, and the run

begins. It is a very difficult country, too, over which they run; there are fewer enclosures and more common and moorland than at present; the fences which separate the enclosures are very different, big, straggling, unkempt blackthorn hedges with drains being the principal obstacles—obstacles which required to be ridden at in very different style from the modern flying fences if you would get to the other side in safety.

The hounds, as has already been intimated, were of a very different character. They were bigger and coarser, such a thing as a “straight” hound was practically unknown; *he* is practically a creation of the hound show. They were throaty—perhaps modern critics would say that they were noisy, but they had wonderfully fine noses, a good cry, and they showed sport and killed their foxes, whilst if they did not run quite so fast as do their successors, they ran quite fast enough for horses to follow them over the undrained and boggy moors which prevailed in the good old times.

Having killed their fox, in many hunts they claimed from the churchwarden of the parish in which he was killed 5s., which was spent in a bowl of punch, and in some it was expected that every man who was up at the death should dine at the nearest public-house, where it is probable that much punch was consumed, and a good deal of the same talk indulged in as that which delights the youthful fox-hunter of the present day over his “long drink” and cigarette. This custom was by no means fair either to hounds or horses, but, though there is no doubt that on occasion there would be more “feast” than “reason” about it, it by no means always implied a drunken orgy.

Hounds were probably to meet at daybreak the following morning, and if at a distant fixture that might entail a couple of hours' riding in the dark, whilst even if it were not a hunting day those of our ancestors who lived in the country were early risers.

Hunt balls and hunt dinners were more common a hundred years ago, and they were conducted on different lines from what they generally are in the present day. They had more of the family gathering about them. Any decent man in the Hunt was welcome to come and bring his wife and daughters to the ball; the price was within the means of almost any man who could hunt; an enjoyable evening was spent, and the old-fashioned Hunt ball was a factor which worked for the good of the Hunt. The same may be said of the Hunt dinner, which was by no means the formal and stiff affair which a public dinner generally is in these days. Perhaps it is impossible to revive the Hunt ball and Hunt dinner on the old lines; perhaps it is undesirable to do so, even if it were possible; but I must own to having a weak corner for them. They may belong to "those good customs" which, if persistently indulged in, "corrupt a world," but they were pretty phases of the country life which was so enjoyable when the first Duke of Cleveland hunted from Stocksfield-on-Tyne to Rufford in Nottinghamshire, and wakened the echoes with his horn, where Bedale, and Lord Zetland's, and York and Ainsty, and Bramham and the Badsworth, and other packs keep "the tambourine a-rowling," to use the words of James Pigg, from October to April.

"The old order changeth," as I have said, but

there is one thing that does not change, and hearts are as true to sport, old hands are as wise, and young hands as keen as when the first Duke of Cleveland rode out from Raby with his retinue of devoted followers. What may be termed the continuity of hunting is one of its principal features. There is nothing spasmodic about it; men may come and men may go, but, like the brook, hunting still goes on its way, let us hope, for ever. Some countries may be given up for a time, but even when they are of the roughest, and what every one but an enthusiast would call unhuntable, some one generally turns up in a few years to try them once more. Badminton, Brocklesby, and Belvoir are still household words, as they have been for upwards of two hundred years, and Wentworth and Milton are still famous for their hounds. John Warde and Mr. Musters, Lord Darlington and "the Squire," and Mr. Assheton Smith have worthy successors in Mr. George Lane Fox and Mr. E. P. Rawnsley, in Lord Zetland, Mr. Corbett, and Lord Lonsdale. In North Wales and Cheshire another Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn reigns as successfully as did his ancestors of that name, and in the wild west the name of Nicholas Snow is associated with sport as it was in the days of the Doones and Katerfelto. And, in spite of gloomy forebodings, there is a bright lookout forward. All over the country are keen young men, who, when they take hold of hounds, do not intend to be the merely ornamental figure-head despised of our worthy friend Jorrocks. They want to *know*, and they *get* to know. Such being the case, the future of fox-hunting seems to be assured, and when a hundred years hence the

hunting of the last century comes to be reviewed, there is every prospect of as brilliant a record as that which has just been glanced at briefly. Other times, other manners, but so long as the old spirit remains, the old sport will survive in spite of its enemies, and the day will never come,

When the gorse is uprooted
The foxhound is dumb.

CHAPTER III

PUPPY WALKING

Unto thy choicest friends
Commit thy valued prize : the rustic dames
Shall at thy kennel wait, and in their laps
Receive thy growing hopes . . .
 and dignify their little charge
With some great title, and resounding name
Of high import. SOMERVILLE.

THE most superficial observer whose experience has reached over a period of a score years cannot fail to be struck with the marked improvement which is shown in the modern foxhound. He has lost that heavy, throaty appearance which at one time prevailed ; badly placed shoulders such as once passed muster are seldom, if ever, seen ; a shoulder-shaken hound is almost unheard of.

Now I do not wish to infer that the present generation knows more about hounds than those which have gone before it ; the “system of Meynell” was not a creation of the nineteenth century, and what one Peter Beckford did not know about hunting was not worth knowing. So, long before the present century put in an appearance, there were packs of hounds as well managed both in the shires and in the provinces as any are to-day. But in the provinces but few hounds were bred, com-

paratively speaking, and even in the shires there were not so many bred as there are at the present day.

I know of one country where, within my recollection, some eight to ten couples were all the puppies sent out to walk season after season, and where now from forty-five to fifty couples of puppies are sent out every year. Nor is this an isolated case. In many four-days-a-week countries that I know, as many as seventy couples will be sent out to walk, and yet only perhaps some sixteen or eighteen couples are put forward. Nor is there any difficulty in finding walks for foxhound puppies ; it is, indeed, the other way on, and there is frequently some trouble in supplying the wants of the puppy walkers.

It may be laid down as a first principle that, no matter how carefully and how well a foxhound puppy may be bred, his excellence, so far as regards make and shape, depends greatly on the quarters he gets, and it is an undoubted fact that it is to the great improvement in puppy-walking methods that the great improvement in the appearance of foxhounds is due. I have seen in my time a poor brute of a foxhound puppy chained to a kennel, fed on all kinds of food till he was "ugly" fat, and confined till he was crooked. "Why do you tie him up?" I asked. "Oh, he runs after the poultry," was the reply. "You are ruining him," said I ; but the good woman would not see it, and very indignant she was when she heard that he was one of the first drafted. "I'm sure he was well done and had plenty of milk," said the worthy lady ; and so he had, and he had also a belly like the fat pig which was not so very far from him.

Milk.—Yes, milk is a *sine qua non* when the whelps are first sent out, though some of them, I fancy, don't get much of it, and yet thrive fairly well. But what milk they get must be good; no skim milk, or whey, or buttermilk should be given under any circumstances. But, as a rule, there is plenty of good pickings about a farmhouse for one hound, or even for two, if a little offal is got from the butcher and boiled. Broth is a grand thing for young hounds, and I don't believe in giving them much raw food.

Food is, of course, an important item, but still more important is liberty. A foxhound puppy should never be shut up save at night, and then he should go into the stable. It is a capital plan to shut a young hound up with your hunters. They get to see and know hounds, and it keeps them from kicking hounds when they are out.

Liberty, I have said, is an essential thing. It is absolutely cruel to keep a young hound shut up in a loose-box even. He will be crooked as a yoke stick, spiritless, and good for nothing, and all the care that has been bestowed upon him will have been bestowed upon him in vain, for he is sure to go in an early draft.

And, sir or madam—you who want to enrol yourselves amongst the noble army of puppy walkers, and it is a noble army, one to which fox-hunters are for ever beholden—do not expect that the innocent-looking and clumsy and somewhat helpless-looking being whom the first whipper-in leaves at your door with a grin, is going to turn out a lapdog at 5 st. 7 lb. He will wax in strength, he will become full of wild animal

spirits, he will romp, and he will get into mischief. And, oh ! what mischief he will get in ! He will chevy the cat till she grows thin and harassed ; he will bounce into the middle of the hens or the ducks when they are being fed ; he will chase them round the yard, wild with the delight of feeling his increasing strength ; any article laid on the grass to bleach he will instantly proceed to tear to pieces in leisurely fashion, and if you shout at him he will most likely run off with it. Don't get angry with him ; don't let the servant throw the broom at him, or, as I have seen, "hammer" him with a thick stick. Bear your annoyances patiently, and think what a fine puppy he is. And also remember that, if you gain his confidence, he is really a very biddable animal indeed.

And if you want to confine the mischief of your puppy within reasonable dimensions, the best thing you can do is to keep a couple. They will play with each other instead of with the poultry, and, though they occasionally meddle with a dishcloth or with linen that comes within their reach, it will only be when their teeth are troubling them.

One thing should be avoided, and that is to let them run with the sheep dog. He will teach them to hunt, but they will want no teaching in that direction. But he may teach them to run sheep. Once detected in that act they should at once be sent back to the kennel.

One golden rule should be observed. When a young hound is ailing send to the huntsman at once, and do not attempt to give any specifics. This, and to keep a couple of puppies instead of one, are golden rules for puppy walkers.

CHAPTER IV

TRAINING THE HUNTER

He must be taught and trained and bid go forth.

Julius Cæsar.

IT is somewhat astonishing to those who know how popular hunting is and the demand that exists for a really well-mannered hunter that that animal should be so very scarce. In any large field of horsemen, pulling, bolting, and refusing animals preponderate, and it is comparatively seldom that a really fine-mannered horse is seen. By a fine-mannered horse I mean one that will go at the pace his rider wishes, whether he be galloping or going at his fences, and this in a crowd. Of course I do not mean that there are no "quiet" horses. Quiet horses may have bad manners as well as the tearing rakeaway type, and generally the "quiet" horse is a spiritless brute, never seen in a good place, and one that seldom gets through a run with credit to himself and satisfaction to his rider. A good-mannered hunter is a different animal from this. He is a horse that always answers to his rider's hand, that does not make a rash bolt when some other horse comes galloping past him, and that jumps his fences, no matter what they may be, in collected form, and in the style in

which they should be jumped. And jumping a fence properly and getting to the other side of one are widely different matters, as I know by painful experience.

But if a man looks round and "tak's notes" when he is hunting he will not wonder that there are so few thoroughly-trained, well-mannered hunters, but that there are, comparatively speaking, so many. Amongst the crowd, and thrusting his way into it in the vain endeavour to take a young one into the place which none but a seasoned hunter can take and keep, will be seen a promising three-year-old with his long coat on him, with an ill-fitting saddle on his back, and a man who fits the saddle worse than the saddle fits the horse. In his mouth will be found a bridle which is put on at haphazard, without much thought being given as to whether it fits or is adapted to the peculiarities of his mouth. The rider has a pair of spurs on with big rowels in them—that goes without saying—and the spurs are always in evidence. So are the rider's hands, heavy, and always pulling at the horse's mouth, which he euphemistically calls "holding him together and lifting him." That the horse has never been schooled at home is clear, and so the first thing his rider does when he brings him out to see hounds is to select some one whose horse has a reputation of being a good jumper, as his unwilling pilot. If the country is an easy one, with flying fences, all goes well enough for a time, the young one jumps big enough, stretching and "yawing" at his bridle as each fence is approached, and going faster and faster at each until, with his lack of condition, he becomes too tired to jump,

and he either refuses or falls. Now, under such circumstances it seems impossible to train a hunter properly, and though some of the bad habits which have been so carefully inculcated into the young horse may be subsequently eradicated by careful and judicious riding, an indifferent horseman soon brings all the old faults to the front.

The training of hunters cannot be commenced at too early an age. When it is remembered that the better bred a horse is and the higher spirited he is the more nervous he is, it stands to reason that from the earliest age he should be accustomed to be handled and made familiar with his master and his ways. Therefore, as soon as is possible, he should be haltered, and whilst he is a foal running with his dam no opportunity should be lost of handling him and getting him to lead. In these days of showing there is generally plenty of pains taken with a likely foal to make him show himself, but as soon as the foal is weaned he is no more noticed, and probably, unless he should be a show horse, is never handled until he is broken in. The breaking in of a hunter is a matter which should certainly not be conducted in a hurried way, and there is too much inclination to think that a month is about plenty of time in which to complete his education. To make a horse have good manners his education should begin, as I have already indicated, when he is a foal, for the same reason that you do not wait to teach a boy to be a gentleman till you send him to college.

When a yearling he should be frequently led about, and when practicable he should be handled every day. I think it is not a bad plan, where the time can be spared, to put him into the bridles for

a fortnight when a two-year-old. A relative of mine, who always had "handy" horses, resorted to this plan, and found it answer admirably. The colt was carefully lunged for a fortnight, and then driven for another week or ten days in long reins, a most useful part of breaking which is far too much neglected. For there is nothing better than the long reins, when used by a workman, to make a horse have a good mouth; and without a good mouth there is no such thing as good manners.

The colt should be continually handled whilst he is turned away, for if he is allowed to become shy again the time that has been spent on him is so much time wasted. I think that it is advisable to commence the serious business of breaking when a colt is three years old, and it is essential that he should be in good condition when the breaking in begins. Otherwise he will fall weak in a short time, and will have either his spirit or his temper broken, both of which are very undesirable. The breaking in of the three-year-old is a crucial period in the history of the horse, and once more I would advocate perseverance with the use of the long reins. Generally there is too great a hurry to get on to a horse's back, for it is no easy work driving a young and well-bred horse about in the long reins. But to ensure a good mouth it is necessary, and a young active man is required for the job. And above all things it is necessary that the man should never hang on the horse's mouth, and that he should secure perfect control over him before he is mounted.

Though it may be too much to say that all cases of bad manners and vice can be traced back to the careless handling of a young horse during

his educational period, there is no doubt that a great deal of what is undesirable in a horse's manner is directly traceable to this cause. There are two great errors which are frequently observable in the riding of a young horse after he has got that he will carry a saddle without taking any very active means to get rid of the man who is on the top of it. The first is generally committed by a self-sufficient groom, conceited of his own powers as a horseman. The horse carries him quietly, and has begun to answer to his bridle, so the clever fellow thinks that he has nothing to do but ride about "like a gentleman." And this he does by letting the horse "put his head" wherever he likes. The consequence is that the horse gets lazy and careless as well as the man, and as bad habits are easily acquired and hard to get rid of, the horse gets into a slovenly way of going which never quite leaves him, no matter how good his subsequent training may be. The other fault is equally disastrous in its effects, the country bumpkin, promoted *pro tem.* to the dignity of horse-breaker, being generally the greatest offender in this way. He has got some sort of a strong seat, *i.e.* by means of keeping fast hold of his horse's head, and wrapping his legs round him, he can manage to "remain." And he is never happy unless he is, as he thinks, "witching the world with noble horsemanship." He is constantly irritating his horse to make him bounce about or even kick, and whichever the poor unfortunate brute does he is sure to get punished. His mouth is sawed at, whip and spurs are used, and all because he does what his rider really wanted him to do. Small wonder then that there are so many

horses who are inclined to take the law into their own hands when age and experience have shown them their strength. There is no exaggeration in these statements; a man has only to go quietly along a country lane to find plenty of instances of both.

It must be palpable to any one that it is of the greatest importance that the man who rides the young horse, and more especially the young hunter, during the first few weeks of his educational career, should be a fine and careful horseman. He should devote the whole of his attention to the horse he is riding, marking his peculiarities of disposition, and doing his best to remedy any little defects of manner, generally caused by nervousness or ignorance, without having recourse to severe punishment. Mind, I am by no means in favour of the molly-coddling and petting treatment advocated by some. When the time comes, as come it must sooner or later, that the horse and his rider have a real difference of opinion, one of them will have to be master, and the more firmly it is impressed upon the horse that it is not he who has got the better of the struggle, the better will it be for both.

Two things should be taught the hunter before ever he sees a fence—to stand quite still whilst he is being mounted, and to walk well. How few hunters we see that do either, yet they may easily be trained with patience. Then, too, a horse should be taught to gallop. I remember riding a horse once, a five-year-old, with a view to purchase. The horse could jump, but he had only been “dodged about” and cantered. I had heard a wonderful account of the cleverness of this animal and looked forward to a good ride. Hounds found in a nice patch of gorse. I got a good

start (there were really only two of us who got away on good terms with hounds), and hounds raced. Under such conditions there is generally a little jealous riding, and "we two" set to work at each other with a will. A few small fields with big fences were crossed all right and then we came into bigger enclosures. And then I found that my horse absolutely did not know how to gallop. As soon as I put him to his top pace he sprawled and sprawled, and after we had run for about a quarter of an hour he gave me a fall that it still makes me sore to think of. A second fall and the deal was "off." Yet he was a good horse, only his education had been neglected.

Having taught your young hunter to walk, trot, canter, and gallop, you may now begin to teach him how to jump, *i.e.* unless you have already given him a few lessons as you were going on with his other work. An old sportsman, who was famous for his timber-jumpers, used to teach them in this way. He laid a strong larch pole down in the opening to the fold where he fed the young ones with corn. They stepped over this, of course, and he gradually increased the height till they were obliged to begin to make little jumps, and he increased it up to 4 feet 6 inches, which he said was big enough for him, and I think it is for most of us. If horses can be induced to jump in this way, or to pop over a little drain in coming for their corn, it is, of course, an excellent plan. Otherwise it is, I think, advisable that the jumping lesson should be postponed till the horse has got pretty well through his rudimentary education; and this for the reason that, with a horse at any rate, one thing at a time is sufficient to learn.

And it is for this reason that I advocate teaching the horse to jump at home. A horse when he goes into the hunting-field has so much to distract his attention that though he may jump if sent on after a known good performer, he will never become really clever and well mannered. I had a horse that had been taught in this way, and though he was clever as a monkey, and a big jumper, very rarely making a mistake, he was somewhat erratic. I believe the majority of well-bred horses like jumping, though many are a trifle shy of taking to it at starting. The best plan I think is to teach your young hunter to jump in the long reins, and for this reason. When you have got him up to the small fence—always begin with a small, but *strong*, fence—he will probably dwell for a time, then suddenly make a big plunge and jump wildly and big. Under these circumstances even a good horseman might take a little too much hold of the horse's mouth when he landed. Every variety of fence should be negotiated in the long reins, and the horse should be encouraged as much as possible by voice. When he has got to jump fairly in the long reins, it is then time to ride him over fences. Companionship is good for him here, but care should be taken *to let him take a line of his own*, and not to ride immediately in the wake of one of the other horses. It is no bad plan to let him take the lead occasionally, and if there are a few old hounds that will run a drag, they may be looked upon as contributing their share to the making of a hunter that should, for the sake both of those who have to ride him and those who have to ride in his company, know a lot of his work thoroughly before he is taken out with foxhounds.

It is obvious that a horse, to become a perfect hunter, must go through some of his schooling with hounds, but there is a good deal of the preliminary schooling which might and ought to be done at home, and which is generally left to the hunting field. In the first place, it is essential that a horse should not be alarmed at or kick at hounds, and to prevent such a contretemps the best plan is for the owner of the young horse to walk a couple of puppies and keep them in the stable with his pupils, who will soon become familiar and friendly with them, and so, as a natural consequence, he will take little notice of hounds when they come across him in the hunting field. In the meantime a word of warning may be given to the man who rides a young horse, or, for the matter of that, an old horse in the hunting field. It is not vice but fear which causes a horse to kick at hounds nine times out of ten, and therefore *it is incumbent upon the rider to keep a careful look-out that hounds don't come too suddenly behind his horse.* In the early part of the cub-hunting season young horses, if they *are* taken out at all, should be kept *out of the rides* and *at a distance* from hounds, for the young hounds have not yet got to know their work, and when they miss their companions *will* run up to any horse they see in the rides in their search for their huntsman. An excellent plan, and one which should always be adopted when possible, is to let a young horse see hounds as frequently as possible when driven in the long reins, taking care, of course, to keep out of the way of hounds. He will be much handier when ridden, though of course he will require careful watching all the same.

When September has well-nigh come to an end, the young hunter may be taken cubbing with advantage, though for the safety of himself and his rider he should have been schooled sufficiently at home to know a good deal of what is expected from him. I don't suppose that any one would now ride a horse out hunting in the breaking bridles as I have seen on occasion, and I suppose that the horse has been so far broken that he can gallop in nice form and pull himself together in obedience to his rider's signal. A hunter, however, has something else to do than to gallop. He has to jump all kinds of fences with the least waste of effort possible, and to enable him to do this he requires a "liberal education." At most large establishments there is what is termed a school—that is, an enclosed place where there are various kinds of fences not necessarily high or formidable, but rather unyielding in their nature. These schools are circular, and there are three or four obstacles to be surmounted. The horse is turned loose without saddle or bridle, and driven over them, with the result that he soon learns to get himself to the other side without "chancing his jumps." A few mornings in one of these schools affords great educational advantages, and after the young horse has gone through a course here he may be lunged or driven with long reins over a series of little fences with narrow drains at one side or another.

Having taught a horse that there is no great difficulty in getting to the other side of an ordinary fence, the next thing to do is to teach him to carry his rider over fences.

It is a very different matter jumping a few

fences at home from jumping them with hounds. Perhaps for a time or two the young one will want sharpening up a bit ; then he will enter into the spirit of the thing, and become a bit wild, not quite caring where he puts his feet. As the country is always sufficiently blind in October, the probability is that he will find himself on his back, than which, should he happen not to hurt himself, —and the odds are very long against his doing so— nothing better can happen to him. He will learn to temper his courage with caution. There is one fault which young horses, and occasionally old ones, develop. They get clever with practice, and then they begin to chance thorn fences. Thorn fences do not require as a rule to be quite so cleanly jumped as stiff posts or rails, but in strongly fenced countries there are many of them with which it is not safe to take liberties. So that when a horse develops the habit of “rushing” his thorn fences he must have another “school,” for which the lunging rein must be called into request. A good stout cart rope six or eight inches from the top of a fence will soon teach the young ’un that he must rise at all of them.

CHAPTER V

WESTWARD HO !

There lies your way, due west.
Then, Westward Ho !—*Twelfth Night*.

THANKS to our increased facilities for travel, the hunting man, even if his leisure be of the shortest, can begin his season sooner by three months than he was wont to do in the good old days when George the Third was king. And lest there should be any misunderstanding, I will here explain that by the hunting man I do not mean a gentleman whose lines are cast in such pleasant places that he can live amongst country pursuits all his life. For that man there is a constant round of happy employment, all leading up to his favourite sport, if he be a hunting man. The individual I have more particularly in my mind is the busy professional man or merchant, a man with little leisure but great love for sport, and who takes his two days a week or three days a fortnight, from November to March, stealing another day whenever he has the chance. For him there is no cub-hunting ; the very fact that his residence is many miles from the scene of action prevents him taking part in that most enjoyable sport. And indeed were he, so to speak, on the

spot, the nature of his avocations would prevent him from taking part in a sport which frequently, in its earlier days at any rate, involves the necessity of rising about 2 A.M.

But in these days of easy and rapid travelling almost any man may manage, with a little contriving, to get a fortnight's holiday in August or September, and where can he take it so well as in the bonnie West Country, where the mighty coombes look like stationary waves, and the heights of Exmoor—home of the handsomest ponies in the world ; home of the blackcock, with his defiant crow ; and, best of all, home of the wild red deer—overlook the tossing waves of the Bristol Channel ? If the good lady of the house wishes to take “the girls to the seaside,” where can she take them to better than Minehead ; and whilst you, my hunting friend, are enjoying yourself to the top of your bent on breezy uplands, there is quite plenty of entertainment for the ladies of your family in exploring the neighbourhood, and on non-hunting days you cannot do better than join them.

Dunster in itself deserves many a pilgrimage, and, *crede experto*, there is ever something new about these quaint North Somerset towns and villages, and ever some stirring bit of history to hear about place or people. It is not at every place along the English coast that a troop of horse took a warship ; but that happened not so many miles from Dunster, as those who know their county history are proud to tell. Of course there are no nigger minstrels or piers with lugubrious bands murdering music *à la* Wagner, but there is a lot of fun to be had in North Somersetshire, leaving the sport out.

But, after all, the sport is the thing—and what a glorious sport it is! An you be a hound man—and I take it that most of my readers are or wish to be—you will, on every day you go out, see something which will appeal to you and live long in your memory, whilst if you be of those to whom a gallop is the be-all and end-all of hunting, it will go hard with you if you have not something to talk about before the end of your fortnight's leave. Indeed, what you see in that fortnight will keep you going to November, and will put you in condition as well. Jumping you will not have, and should you chance, as I have done more than once, to fall in with a stag that takes you more miles than I care to estimate before he stands at bay, and that keeps on before hounds for the short period of *four hours and twenty minutes*, you will, I fancy, however great a "glutton for fencing" you may be, be thankful for small mercies as I was, and be glad to put your jumping exploits off "till the forty minutes on the grass," which is the acme of your delight, comes off.

One word, though, I must say to you in warning. If you should perchance be an adept in the hunting of the fox or the timid hare, forget all the woodcraft that those pursuits have taught you. Hunting the wild red deer is a thing *per se*, and is very different in many respects from the preconceived notions one is apt to form of it. To thoroughly enjoy stag-hunting on Exmoor it must be judged by its own standard. It is unfair to fox-hunting and it is unfair to stag-hunting to compare the two. There is no common ground of comparison, and for my own part I could take two hours or three over Exmoor with a stag one

day, and “forty minutes o’er the grass without a check” the next, *æquo animo*.

A friend of mine once said to me when the sun was pouring its rays down on us in pitiless fashion, and the radiation of the heat from the grand stand—it was at a race meeting—made the enclosure seem like the Black Hole at Calcutta, at 5 st. 7 lb., for heat, “It is too hot to hunt.” My reply was, “Is it?” It is never too hot or too anything to hunt, save too frosty or too foggy, from the first by-day the Devon and Somerset have till the remotest moorland pack has killed its May fox. Bear that in mind, my hunting tyro, and so shall you see many a good run you would otherwise have missed.

So my advice to all and sundry of my hunting friends is to try and get a fortnight on the breezy uplands of Somersetshire and Devon, to make a pilgrimage to the mythical Doone valley, and all the better will that pilgrimage be appreciated if there should be a “stag o’ ten” before you that had led you nearly a four-hours’ chase “o’er brake and scaur” from the Deer park, as happened when I first set eyes on that picturesque spot.

If you have any eye for the picturesque in scenery or in hunting—if you have any love of hounds and hound work, if you delight in scrambling over a rough country and in overcoming difficulties—in a word, if you view hunting in any other light than that of galloping so many miles in an apocryphal number of minutes, and jumping so many fences of more or less—generally less—formidable proportions, you will enjoy yourself immensely, even should your luck be out, and you should fail to fall in with one of those brilliant

gallops which would prove such a sure test of your horse's stamina, and—equally important—of your own. Perhaps, to a man who thinks that hunting means nothing more than over-riding hounds in Leicestershire or Northamptonshire pastures, the advice to hunt with the Devon and Somerset is superfluous. He would go down, look at the horse which he hired with undisguised contempt, dub the country impossible, and think his time wasted. In other words, he would see nothing. But there are men who can hold their own with the best, men who “rush across the brimming brook, who top the post and rail,” to whom the grand instinct of the hound appeals as strongly as does the “madness of the gallop, fifty minutes on the grass”; and they are the men whom I venture to advise in the matter of early hunting, and for them I give a few of my own impressions and experiences. If they are the men I take them for, we shall, I think, find subject for mutual congratulation when we forgather after their hunting experiences in the “wild west country.”

In the first place I would strongly advise any one who intends to hunt with the Devon and Somerset not to take his own horses. The probability is that if he does he will find himself in a “tight place,” out of which he will have some difficulty in getting with credit to himself, or even with safety. I had to ride up and down a precipitous sort of place, nearly as steep as a house-side, which I tackled with a *tremor cordis* which was certainly not shared by the good mare placed at my disposal, and I may say that I would sooner face the biggest jumpable place in Yorkshire on one of my own horses, with the certainty of a fall, than ride the

same animal up and down that same place in Cutcombe Covert. And if, when you hire, you should find what, to your experiences of hunting in the more or less fashionable country of your choice, you feel inclined to dub an undersized, common-looking horse placed at your service, don't despise him. He will carry you forty or fifty miles in a day, or even more, galloping over the stony moors when occasion calls, and come home, where a quarter of a mile of level going is bad to meet with, in a manner which is sure to win your admiration, even if he is, from your standpoint, a plain one.

^{For a}The first thing that will strike a hound man when he looks at the Devon and Somerset pack is the wonderful skill with which his favourite fox-hound is bred. It stands to reason that a pack of hounds, the lowest standard of which is 25 inches, must be largely dependent on drafts, and when I had a look at the hounds on the flags I met with representatives of such old canine friends as the Bramham Sailor, the Cleveland Galopin and Cottager, the Brocklesby Acrobat, and York and Ainsty Falstaff and Windsor, the Belvoir Pirate, and others too numerous to mention. But there the fox-hunter's reminiscences must cease. If he wants to enjoy the hunting of the wild red deer, he must forget all that he knows about fox-hunting ; yet he will find that same knowledge of fox-hunting obtruding itself occasionally, and needing stern repression. In the first place, he is sure to miss the excitement and dash which is attendant on drawing for a fox, and from what he has read he will be inclined to think that all stag-hunters have to do is to go and put up the harboured stag

as a hare is put up from her form. "You know he is there ; go and find him," will be his feeling, and he almost expects that the tufters will draw up to him, bustle him about the covert till he has made up his mind to break, and there is an end of that part of the proceedings. Perhaps this may be the case when the ideal prevails. When the real prevails, when scent is nil—as it was on the occasion of my visit—something very different takes place.

Let me try to give some explanation of what stag-hunting is like on a bad scenting day, and *pace* my bruising friends, of the beauties which it presents. The fixture was Exford, and they proceeded, I think, to Dunkery, where a stag had been harboured. The covert—or, perhaps, I ought to say the range of coverts—is V-shaped, and as Anthony proceeded to draw with his tufters, a hind, and a remarkably fine one, trotted leisurely away within a couple of hundred yards of him ; three or more hinds were seen afterwards, but *Cervus major* remained unseen. Then, with a couple and a half more tufters added, Cutcombe Covert was tried, and hounds spoke, and hinds were seen, and once I saw a stag, but this was when hounds were over at the Timberscombe side. At the Timberscombe side of the road there was some very pretty tufting, but to a man used to fox-hunting there was a lack of the cry of the full pack, which was occasionally puzzling. As I galloped up the road in the wake of the harbourer, I was much struck by the quickness with which he discerned, as he galloped along at top pace, that the stag had crossed the road. To pull up his horse, and say, "He has gone in here," was the work of a moment, and it was an exhibition of skilled woodcraft which could not fail to appeal to any one

who appreciates the beauties of that fine art. In the meantime we were informed that the stag which had been harboured at Dunkery had gone away, and all possible haste was made to get to the place. "Forty minutes gone," was the announcement when the Master appeared with the pack. Such a case would have been hopeless had a fox been before us, and that I had my misgivings I must own. To see the way hounds worked over the moor was charming, and this in spite of the fact that a large field unduly pressed on them. They hunted along, not at any great pace it is true, but still keeping well to their work, to Horner Hill and Cloutsham, and finally they had to go home without blood.

It was a moderate day's sport, yet a most enjoyable one withal. If the dash of foxhounds breaking covert with a fox was wanting, as of necessity it was, to make up for it there was the wonderful steadiness of the tufters, who were easily turned from the hinds, and that without any noise of rating and whip cracking. The handiness of the tufters impressed me much, and I was equally charmed with the admirable manner in which the hounds worked the stag across from Dunkery to Horner. All that was wanting to make a good run was a little better scent and a better start. The cunning of the stag was exemplified in a remarkable manner, and that alone was worth going a long way to see. The keeper was emphatic in his assertions that the stag was in a certain corner of the covert. Yet carefully as Anthony drew round the thicket, no tufter could own that he was there, and though the keeper went down to dislodge him, he never budged an inch. Then for

two hours he lay close, within a few hundred, a very few hundred yards of a large crowd of horse-men, who were smoking, lunching, and chatting, and otherwise making a noise. When he was ready, and not till then, he roused himself from his lair, but once he made a start he made the best use of his time, and being well halloed at he kept travelling.

In one other particular I must advise my fox-hunting friends to forget their fox-hunting experiences. *Festina lente* is a good motto for those who ride with the Devon and Somerset, and a masterly inactivity on occasion is the sure road to ultimate triumph. If a man were to act on the same lines as if he were riding to foxhounds, he would find that his horse had put in a good day's work before the real business of the day had begun, with the result that he would find himself "left" at the finish. For the wild red deer travel far and fast, and there is not often a chance of a second horse in a run.

The best plan for a man to adopt is to select some well-known native as his pilot, make up his mind to always keep him in sight—no easy matter, *bien entendu*, if there should be a scent; and then if, when at the end of from ten to twenty miles through some of the loveliest scenery in the United Kingdom, he is not satisfied that he has been more than repaid for his trouble, his case must be put down as a hopeless one. And one thing is certain, if he does appreciate what he sees, he will want to have a repetition of it, and that at an early date.

When Dr. Collyns wrote his charming book stag-hunting in the West had sunk to a somewhat low ebb. Poaching and deer-stealing had done

much to bring down the head of red deer on Exmoor, and it was feared by many good sportsmen, Dr. Collyns amongst the number, that the wild stag would soon be but a memory. And indeed at the time that Dr. Collyns wrote such a state of things did not appear at all unlikely. In 1855, hounds were only out twenty-five days killing two stags and two hinds, and this seemed about what there was to spare, and though they never fell to so low an ebb as this again, in the years in which Dr. Collyns was preparing his great work for the press, viz. in 1861 and 1862, they hunted little, and deer were scarce. In the former year they were out twenty-eight times, killed four stags and four hinds, and took and saved one hind and one young male deer; whilst in 1862 they hunted twenty-seven days, killed six stags, and saved one stag and three hinds. During the Mastership of Mr. Bisset, which lasted from 1855 to 1890—a period of twenty-six years—the head of deer gradually increased, and had Dr. Collyns lived till Lord Ebrington took the horn, he would have had his heart gladdened by a long season of eighty-nine days, with a record of twenty-three stags and fifty-seven hinds, as well as ten other deer killed at the end of it.

And now, four hundred years after we have a record of the first Master of Staghounds who hunted Exmoor exactly as Exmoor is hunted at the present day, there is a larger head of deer on the moor than there has been at any time during the century. It shows how sporting a spirit exists in the far West, and what good fellows are the farmers of Devonshire and West Somerset, that the century should go out with a better head

of deer in the country than there was when it came in ; for the red deer, if he does not molest the hen roosts or run off with a newly dropped lamb, plays fine havoc with a field of turnips and a field of corn or an orchard ; your stag being an especially dainty feeder, and the best of everything good enough for him. Two days a week was what had to satisfy stag-hunters till 1878, since which date, save from August to October 1883, when they hunted four days a week, they have hunted three days a week. And yet, though the country has been diligently hunted, deer have increased to such an extent that Sir John Amory has started another pack with which to hunt the outskirts of the country, and excellent sport he showed last season, which was his first. And still the deer increase, so Mr. Sanders has determined on hunting four days a week this season, taking the horn one day himself.

Never, perhaps, since the Devon and Somerset Staghounds were known by that name, has the general outlook been so bright as it was at the opening of the season of 1898. A popular Master, a skilful huntsman, an excellent pack of hounds, visitors and natives keen on the sport to a man, and everywhere plenty of deer—everything indeed looks *couleur de rose*. Yet is there a cloud, “a little cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand,” but one which may grow till it blots out stag-hunting altogether. A syndicate of Welsh speculators propose to construct a light railway from Minehead to Lynton, which will run right across Exmoor, and which will render stag-hunting impossible. They absolutely talk about making a station at Waters’ Meet. And no one wants the railway ; every

landowner, save one, is opposed to the scheme ; and the farmers know well enough that any small benefit which will accrue to them from a slightly accelerated traffic will be more than counterbalanced by losing their best customers, the men who come down yearly to the West to enjoy a sport such as no other country but our own can show, and which for four hundred years—ay, and more—has gladdened the hearts of the brave men of the West, without any practical interruption.

Curiously enough, the inquiry into the light railway scheme, the chief result of which will be the flooding of Devonshire and Somersetshire with Welsh miners from the Rhondda valley—a questionable benefit indeed—will be held on the day when the season will open at Haddon. Let the scheme be opposed with all the power of two united counties, say I, and I cannot better conclude than with Dr. Collyns's noble words : " I trust," says he, " that ' the nobilitie ' and youths of the West of England will follow the steps of their forefathers, that every man will, to the best of his power, use his influence in preventing the noblest of English sports falling again into desuetude, and that if the time come when it should be necessary to use exertion in order to prevent the discontinuance of sport which it has been the pride, the boast, and the pleasure of the good men and true of North Devon and Somerset for many a century past to have enjoyed, those who have the power of doing so, and their number is not small, will, with heart and soul, combine to give their support to the maintenance of the hounds and the preservation of the deer, and show by acts unmistakable, and not by words merely, that they

do in all sincerity wish ‘Prosperity to Stag-Hunting.’” And bear this in mind, that the day which sees cut the first sod of a railway to cross Exmoor will see the beginning of the end of the chase of the wild red deer.

CHAPTER VI

REPLENISHING THE STUD

Offering the benefit of a little personal experience to men, who being circumstanced like myself, and deeply engaged in . . . important pursuits, might be glad to receive it.

CAVEAT EMPTOR, *The Adventures of a Gentleman in Search of a Horse.*

OPINIONS vary considerably as to what is the best time for a man to look about him to fill up the breaks made in his stud by the wear and tear of past seasons. Of course, the easiest way of answering an important question like this is to say to the tyro, buy a horse as soon as ever you see one that is like suiting you. But that is just where the difficulty comes in. You may think a horse very like your purpose during the summer months, you may buy him, and when November finds the season again commenced, you may find that, for your purpose, the horse on which you prided yourself so much is worthless. There are men who will hold out that the end of the season is the best time for a man to buy a hunter, that then he has lost all the fat which hides a multitude of faults, and that his legs, if they have any inherent weakness, will then show it. All of which contentions have much to recommend them, but

unfortunately there is a weak place in the advice. In the first place, there is a long summer's keep to pay for, which adds considerably to the apparently reasonable price that the horse may have cost at first. Then, again, there may be such a thing as the horse having been carefully nursed all the year, that what you think are only trade marks are something worse; and that when your horse comes into work you find that he is simply a lame one, and for your purpose worth about an eighth of what he cost. So, unless a man is a good judge, and even if he be a good judge, it is scarcely wisdom to buy at the end of the season.

What to buy and where to buy it are naturally questions which present themselves to a man who is in want of horses, and perhaps the first question is the one that had best be answered first. To begin with, a man should make up his mind at once whether he intends to try to hold his own with the flyers of the Hunt with which he is about to cast in his lot, or whether his ambition is of a milder order, and he only requires an animal that will show him a fair amount of sport without making any strenuous effort in the way of galloping and jumping. Then, having made up his mind as to his requirements, and as to the price he intends to give for the horses he wants, let him go to some respectable dealer—there are plenty in any hunt of note—and say what he wants, and when he wants it. And there is no better time than September for a man to make his wants known, for he will be able to tell, in the few gallops which generally take place in October, whether the horse he has bought is like suiting

him or not, and he will be able to get on friendly terms with his new purchase before the galloping begins in earnest. One thing must be firmly impressed on the would-be-buyer's mind, and that is, under no circumstances to buy a horse that is not suited to the country. A horse that would be a safe conveyance over Leicestershire or Northamptonshire would prove a very sorry mount in the moors and hills which abound in the Cleveland and Captain Johnstone's countries.

There are some men who go about the country saying that hunting men should buy their horses of farmers, and that if they do not do so they are acting unfairly to the men over whose land they ride. With this opinion I emphatically disagree, and in the long run there is no pecuniary saving by so doing. Indeed, I am convinced that for a man who wants to hunt for amusement, it is a mistake to buy his horses from a farmer, and that sooner or later he will regret it. To begin with, it is seldom that a farmer has a horse that has come to age. Most farmers' horses are picked up at four years old, or at five years old at the most, and my experience of hunting tells me that no horse under six years old is fitted to carry a man a long day's hunting, week after week, without missing his turn, and probably breaking down in the long run. Of course, there are farmers and farmers, and I know of many farmers whose farming is subordinated to their dealing in hunters. To these men you can go without fear. But the farmer who has but two or three horses of his own is the man to avoid. It is highly improbable, though he be a good man over a country himself, that his horses will carry you with hounds with

that degree of comfort that you require, and there is no sending a horse back to a farmer. You are also more likely to get a misfit at a farmer's, and it is pretty certain that *you* will never get a bargain at the farmer's hands, whatever the dealer may do.

I am not one of those, however, who blame the farmer for charging more to a private customer than he does to a dealer, for the private customer is a man who only comes once in a way, and does not take all the horses, good, bad, and indifferent, which the farmer breeds, as the dealer generally does, if they are not too bad. And it is to this very fact that I attribute the fact that a man oftener gets a misfit when buying from a farmer than when buying from a dealer. The dealer has his money locked up in horses ; the farmer breeds one or two, and does not care much whether he suits his customer or not. The dealer, on the contrary, is anxious that his customer should have the animal he wants ; if he pleases him, he knows that it will lead to increased custom. One thing which makes the dealer's horse a better one for the average hunting man to buy is that he is ridden by many different men, he gets accustomed to different handling, and he soon gets to accommodate himself to fresh riders as a consequence of his training and his practice. Then there is the great factor of being suited at once. I take it that no man who hunts for pleasure wants to spend his time rough-riding a raw or unformed horse, or re-breaking one that does not come nicely to his hand. With most dealers there is no difficulty on this point. If the horse does not suit they will take him back and furnish another. Of course, they will charge something for so doing, but the

privilege is well worth what is charged for it, and unless a man is very full of whims, he seldom has to send a horse back if he goes to a good dealer to begin with.

Notwithstanding the growing popularity of auction sales, I cannot recommend them, unless some well-known stud happens to be going up for sale, and then the prices are sure to be extravagant. It sometimes happens, however, that a man may know something about a horse which is sent up to the Repository, and then he may be able to make a bargain, but generally in such a case the value of the horse is known to more than one. Indeed it is as well to avoid all thoughts of getting a cheap bargain when you are buying horses, and the apparent cheap bargains often turn out bitter disappointments. In conclusion, I may say that during a pretty long experience, I have bought horses from dealers, farmers, and once, and once only, at an auction. The latter was one of the most satisfactory purchases I ever made, but had other people known the horse and as much about him as I did, I should have had to give at least £50 or £60 more for him than he cost me. The result of my experience is that I shall, for the future, buy my horses of dealers. All my transactions with dealers have been satisfactory, for if the horse I got was not quite what I wanted, I soon got one that was, and the only unsatisfactory deals I have had have been with farmers, men who, like the Heathen Chinee, were child-like and bland.

Note.—Lest my remarks respecting buying hunters from farmers may be misunderstood, I have thought it

advisable to reprint a criticism on the article when it originally appeared and my reply to it. I need scarcely say that I never heard any more of those hunters in farmers' hands.

I see in your last issue that a gentleman signing himself "Marmaduke" is strongly against sportsmen buying their hunters from farmers; in fact, he almost makes the poor farmer out to be a rogue. I think this is very hard upon the farmers, as they have little enough to turn the penny upon—and how does it happen that a man like Stokes, of Market Harbro', maintains that the best horses that cross Leicestershire are bought in the North of England, and I can prove that nine out of ten are bought from farmers, as Mr. Stokes keeps an agent in Newcastle-on-Tyne, who goes through the three northern counties buying up all the best animals. And "Marmaduke" also states that people should eschew horses sold at sales. How does it come that Irish dealers sometimes average from £80 to £100 on from ten to twelve horses, both at Tattersall's and York? If the people were taken in, does he mean to say that they would come back a second time? I fear "Marmaduke's" experience in horseflesh is very limited and narrow. There are as good men farmers in the North as there are in the shires, for all they do not wear stays.

GLENDALE.

Though I do not, as a rule, reply to letters of such a personal nature as that which appears over the signature of "Glendale" in your last week's issue, I will break through my rule for once. In his remark about "wearing stays," I suppose "Glendale" attempts to be funny. He succeeds in being vulgar, and I must congratulate him on his success. During my "limited and narrow" experience of thirty-seven seasons with hounds, I have bought one or two horses, as well as bred them, and I have had more opportunities of becoming acquainted with the trade in hunters in all its bearings during the last five-and-twenty years than falls to the lot of most men. I do not

“almost make the poor farmer out to be a rogue,” I neither say nor imply such a thing, and my only reply to the criticism is, if the cap fits, wear it. But, in spite of my critic, I repeat that I advise the man who wants a *hunter* to go to a dealer instead of a farmer. “Glendale” boasts about the good horses there are in Northumberland. May I ask how many six-year-old horses there are in farmers’ hands, horses well bred and up to weight, that know their work, and are fit to put into the hands of a man to take to work at once? I know something about the horses in Northumberland, and I venture to say that of horses such as I mention there are very few, if any; the country has been too well scoured for that. If there are any, and “Glendale” will tell you where they are, I will either come or send an agent to see them, and if they are good ones they will be bought. I take it a man wants a hunter, a horse that can carry him across country, and come out in his turn, not a four-year-old or five-year-old; and if a farmer—perhaps it is necessary again to say that by “farmer” I mean a man who only has a horse or two, and who does not devote a large proportion of his time and capital to the making of hunters (such a man I call a dealer)—has a horse older than that now, when the competition is so keen, and the country is so scoured for horses by “men like Stokes,” it is pretty safe to assume that there is a good reason for his not being sold. I have bought many horses of farmers as three-year-olds, four-year-olds, and sometimes as yearlings, and even foals, some of which have turned out well, some badly, but as I was not writing to men who buy horses to graze or improve, but for men

who want horses to work, and come out regularly, taking the rough with the smooth, I naturally did not class them as hunters.

It does not require any special knowledge to be able to teach "Glendale" something about those Irish horses which have averaged £80 to £100 at auction sales. I do know how many of the horses that have been sold at the various Repositories have finished, and that, I take it, is the criterion of a hunter's capabilities, and not the price he brings. But "Glendale" assumes otherwise, and he must be right.

Of the Irish horses that have been sold at one Repository during the last few years, I can safely say that there have not been half a score that have given satisfaction to their purchasers. Many of them were decidedly of the harness type, and made good match horses, and for this purpose many were bought. In one case, where some useful and well-bred horses were bought at a long price, the purchaser got scarcely any hunting out of them the first season, and none at all before Christmas, for they went to pieces directly they were put into work, and I could multiply such instances almost indefinitely. My own experience of buying hunters—*i.e.* made horses from farmers—is, as I have already said, rather a painful one. Two out of the three were bottled-up horses. One of them I rode two or three times, the other I hacked once. The third horse was as good a bit of horseflesh as a man need wish to have, and he had not gone to the dealer's because he was not fashionable enough in appearance. But unfortunately he had been messed about by the farmer's men, and when he got into a crowd he was rather rash. His rashness

caused me a fall at a place he ought to have walked over, and the consequence was three months on my back. A season's steady riding and quiet handling worked wonders, but the old impulsiveness was shown at times, and even with horsemen a long way above the average there were times when that horse was a handful. I think it would have been better for me to have given a dealer a good profit on that horse, if the dealer had got him before he was spoiled by the farmer's man ; "Glendale" doubtless thinks otherwise.

I don't care to say anything more about myself, but you, sir, know that I hunted with between thirty and forty packs of hounds in my time, and that I know a good deal about most of the countries I have hunted in. I have perhaps during my time done more for the farmer than "Glendale," both with my pen and in other and more practical ways, and no man sympathises with the tenant-farmer in the difficulties with which he has to contend more than I do, but that by no means implies that I am to advise a man to buy from a farmer what my "limited and narrow experience" teaches me will not suit him. I have nothing more to add, except that I shall reply to no further letters on this subject, and that I am anxiously waiting to know where these good hunters are.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST MORNING EXERCISE

This morning, like the spirit of a youth
That means to be of note, begins betimes.

Antony and Cleopatra.

Full many a glorious morning have I seen.

SHAKESPEARE, *Sonnet XXXIII.*

IF a man be fond of hounds and possessed of ample leisure, there is no better way in which he can spend his mornings during the month of August and the early part of September than in joining hounds when they are out for their "long exercise." Indeed, if his leisure be scarce it is well worth his while to make an effort to have at least one or two mornings' exercise with the pack of which he speaks lovingly as "our hounds." For a man who loves a country life there is ever something new to see in those country rides in the early hours succeeding the dawn of an August morning, the sun shining brightly but without the intensity which inconveniences later in the day, the cobwebs in the hedges, the belated hare wandering back to her form, the busy and ubiquitous rabbit scuttling hurriedly out of the way of the horse's feet as you ride along the bridle road, a bridle road which recalls so many happy memories that you fall into

a reverie as your horse jogs along, a reverie only to be broken by the playfulness on the part of your horse as he hears the note of the horn you both of you love so well, which announces that you have arrived at the place at which you had arranged to meet your friend the huntsman and his charges.

Having joined forces you jog along through bridle roads and across patches of common, and as this there is no time so good to get to know the entry and to renew acquaintance with the veterans of the pack. The huntsman is always cheery on these occasions, and perhaps has more to say about the mystery of his craft than he has at any other time. Indeed, speaking personally, I think I can say that I have learnt more about hounds and hunting, and foxes and their ways, during these morning rides than at any other time. When a huntsman is hunting, his thoughts are too much occupied with the business of the day to be very communicative, but on these occasions he has his hounds thoroughly broken, and he is, as it were, open to the enjoyment of the pleasures of memory and the pleasures of hope at the same moment. Who, under these circumstances, would not be communicative, especially when he has a kindred spirit to take into his confidence? So the man who joins the huntsman on these fine summer mornings, thereby gaining his favour in a way those who only turn out in all the panoply of the chase on the first of November are little aware, gets many a wrinkle which will serve him in good stead when leaves are fallen and the country is rideable, if he be a man of observation and memory, which I take leave to think will be the case, or otherwise he would not be there.

After passing along country roads and bye-ways for some time, a bit of open ground is reached ; it may be the purple moorland, or it may be a well-wooded gentleman's park. "We'll let them have a look at a hare or two," says the huntsman to his whippers-in, and forthwith you are jogging over the country, hounds spreading well about and the whippers-in on the alert for riot. Up bounces a bumping old hare out of her form, to run, after the manner of her kind under such circumstances, the gauntlet of the whole pack. That, you might think, if you had never been out with your huntsman-friend before, would be a moment of anxiety for him. But nothing of the sort ; he knows his are not the hounds to run riot, and that his youngsters are so well bred and so well drilled that even the wildest of them that has been well entered to hare when out at quarters, will take no notice of the riot that is in front of them. So the old hare bounces along, almost under the very noses of the hounds, and the old hounds take no notice of her whatever, as becomes their years and their wisdom, whilst the young ones do nothing more than look at her in idle wonder, not unmixed with good-natured contempt, as who should say, "We have better and nobler quarry than you to follow." For it is one of the attributes of a well-bred foxhound, descended from a line of disciplined ancestors, that when those who have to do with him have obtained his confidence he is soon taught to avoid riot, especially if quiet methods are taken with him, and there is not an overabundance of noisy rating and whipcord.

A special pleasure which attaches to these rides is the corky way your horse carries you. Gay and

light-hearted, and getting his hocks well under him, he moves in such gallant style that you are positive he is a better horse than he was last season. Surely this cannot be the horse that gave you such a cropper at the end of the fast twenty-five minutes from Holly Berry Gorse last November. Surely this is not the same animal that was as "crisp as a biscuit" that time they rattled a stout hill fox from Mudbury Slack to Slowley-on-the-Hill, and that you had to get to a hospitable farmer's there to nurse him up a bit ere you could get him home. You are sure that he is a much better horse than he was then. Well, may you be right! Probably you are both wiser than you were last season, and your horse will know better than to "rush" a big fence when he is a little blown, whilst you will know better than to bustle him through heavy plough and against the hill after you have gone for forty minutes at top pace. Here's luck to the pair of you!

A hospitable farmhouse is now at hand, and there are a couple of puppies out at walk, so a call is made to see how they are getting on, and the farmer, as good a sportsman as ever buckled on spur, is eager to ask what the prospect is, and "talk hunting," notwithstanding that it was all talked over with him last market day, and his wife, on hospitable thoughts intent, brings out eatables and drinkables that are welcome after the long ride, and talks with pride of the cup she won with the puppies last season, and prophecies that she will win again with Remus or Rarity, or both of them, who are having a fine game with an old duster, which they are speedily rendering useless for any purpose.

And now the ride is over, hounds are nearly back at their kennel, and you have spent a pleasant morning and added to your knowledge of the sport of kings. You have also done something towards putting your horse, and, equally important, yourself, into condition. It is the last long exercise, and as you part from the huntsman where your roads separate, he draws up for a moment to say, "I'm going to take 'em up to Slowford Marshes on Wednesday morning, if you've nothing much to do. I *might* just run 'em through the covert to see if there's a litter of cubs there. I shall be there at 5 o'clock."

CHAPTER VIII

CUB-HUNTING

It is, I think, a very satisfactory sign that cub-hunting is increasing in popularity, and certainly the cub-hunting fields of the present day are much larger than was the case a few years ago. I am not alluding to cub-hunting fields in October, mind. Then cub-hunting is a very different matter from what it is in August and September, and it may be fairly laid down that a man who will get up at 4 A.M. or earlier in order to ride ten or a dozen miles to meet hounds in either of those months when a gallop is almost out of the question either knows something about hounds and hound work or is anxious to learn.

“You are the best fellow in the world,” I once heard a master of hounds say to one of his first-flight men; “you are a good sportsman and don’t override hounds, but your knowledge of hunting is absolutely nil.” That remark often occurs to me when I hear the young enthusiast, full of the “madness of the gallop, forty minutes on the grass,” without a thought to hounds that have shown him sport; or when I hear the same enthusiast criticise an experienced huntsman because he will hunt his fox instead of galloping

somewhat aimlessly about a country as the manner of some is, and so affording the said enthusiast plenty of opportunity for the bruising in which his soul delights, and which to him is the be-all and the end-all of fox-hunting. Now, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not wish to imply that because a man is a hard rider and prefers a fast burst to walking a fox to death, he therefore knows or cares nothing about hounds. Nothing can be farther from the fact, but I would point out to those hard riders who do not understand hounds and hound work that their enjoyment of the most brilliant and fastest gallop they were ever in would be much enhanced were they capable of seeing the niceties of hound work. For these niceties are to be seen in the fastest gallop as well as in the slower hunting run, only it is difficult always to get into a place to see them. That, however, is a detail which may best be left to them; they will no doubt try to solve the difficulty to their satisfaction. But there is another aspect of the case, and one that will obtrude itself. The time will come to all of us, sooner or later, when nerve will give way and advancing years will no longer permit us to join or attempt to join in the first flight. Then there is the choice of two evils: giving it up altogether, or, by means of a good stout cob, knowledge of the country, and skill in woodcraft, seeing plenty of fun and the death of many a good fox. Which is the preferable course? I think the question scarcely admits of argument.

A gentleman whom I have the privilege of knowing intimately, and who is now advanced in years, has got more fun out of hunting than any

man I know. He rode to hounds for fifty seasons, and his nerve was good to the last, whilst when I first knew him he was the hardest of the hard. Then he gave up all at once, because with increasing years he became rather lame, and he found that riding increased his lameness and was injuring his health. That it was rather a trial he admits, but it was the right thing to do, and he did it. None of his friends knew what it cost him, and his interest in hunting was as keen as ever. But then from his youth upwards he had been a hound man, noting with the keenest interest the fine instinct of that most sagacious animal the fox-hound. On the flags he was and is a fine judge of make and shape, as in the field he is a keen critic of work. Neighbouring kennels are frequently visited by him, and a rare treat it is to be one of the party at such times. He also goes out on foot or in a carriage whenever opportunity presents itself, and it would astonish some of those gentlemen who are forward riders to learn what he sees. And best of all is the interest preserved in the sport of sports, an interest which is not confined to a record of the past, but which is keenly alive to all that is going on in the present. It is, I think, worth taking a little trouble to obtain a knowledge which will enable you to enjoy your favourite sport, even when age prevents you taking the place you were once wont to occupy to your own satisfaction.

Therefore it is that I strongly recommend all those who have the opportunity to get as much early cub-hunting as they can. I may be told that the huntsman does not care to see many out during the earlier days of the cub-hunting season,

and perhaps there is something in that. But what the huntsman really objects to is an excited, holloaing, galloping crowd. When you go cubbing you should select your place and stick pretty closely to it. By so doing you are sure to see some of the fun either sooner or later, whilst you will interfere with neither hounds nor hunt servants. Lucky for you if the huntsman entrusts you with a corner to prevent hounds getting away with an old fox or to ride the cubs back into the covert, and keep hounds out of any standing corn that there may be about. He is very likely to do so if you have accompanied him in his morning exercise, and if he does you will have fine opportunities afforded you of seeing something of the cunning of the animal who affords you so much sport, and of the fine instinct and handiness of hounds. You will also have some fun if cubs be at all plentiful, and your horse will want to be in good condition, for a well-grown cub will make him gallop his best, albeit he does not appear to be going very fast. If you be a man who observes keenly there will not be a day you spend in cub-hunting that you will not learn something fresh about hounds and foxes, for it must be borne in mind that in cub-hunting you have nothing else to look after but hounds and foxes in the earlier days of the season, riding being quite a secondary consideration.

One of the great pleasures connected with early cub-hunting is to get into a wood where the rides are wide and clear from obstruction. It stands to reason that the man who goes into the wood must not be accompanied by a crowd, and that he must remain perfectly quiet if he wants to see the fun.

But if, as is to be hoped, foxes are plentiful, he will not have long to wait before the fun begins. There, with ears pricked and stealthy stride, comes the cunning old vixen, pausing for a moment ere she crosses the ride into the covert again. She knows well enough that her hereditary foes are astir again, and it does not need the opening note of old Warrener to warn her that it is time for her to make herself scarce. So with a swing of her brush she makes the best of her way into the open, where for the present there is safety. Soon a cub or two cross the ride, and then, driving on in front, come some of your old friends and some of your new ones. Old Melody, you are glad to see, shows no sign of failing powers yet, and the young Solomons, which you have looked upon with such admiration when you attended the huntsman in his long morning exercise, are dashing to the front in a way which recalls the best form shown by their famous sire. So you sit in the ride, moving occasionally to another coign of vantage, but never attempting to ride to hounds, of course. And then they come round to you again, and again you see the young Solomons driving on in front. The cub is running short, and hounds have overshot him, and probably your young friends may make a wildish cast on their own account. But Gleaner knows better, and, hunting with the closeness which experience teaches, he is soon on the line again. Then see how the young ones score to cry again, and what a cry it is, that of forty couples of foxhounds close on their fox. Another sharp turn—now they are viewing him; that hasty growl tells that they have him, and in another second you hear the

huntsman's whoo-whoop ! Then if the huntsman is an old hand he will let the young ones have their own way with their fox, and never attempt to take him from them, and the sun now being well up and hounds having killed a brace, he will wisely go home, every one having seen something that has added to his knowledge of hunting if he has looked on with an appreciative eye. And it is astonishing how the knowledge thus gained in the early summer mornings comes in useful later in the season, and how much knowledge is gained by the man who spends as much of his time as he can afford in rattling the cubs about.

Cub-hunting is by no means to be entered upon lightly and as of little consequence, for on the way in which it is conducted will the sport of the season in a great measure depend. It means something more than the mere getting hounds plenty of blood. That is a detail, an important one it is true, but still a detail, as the mere learning to read is a detail in the education of the scholar. It is the hound's natural instinct to hunt, and I believe he would rather hunt a fox than anything else, in which his instinct is very nearly allied to that common sense of which we so frequently boast. But he has to be taught to hunt the fox properly ; to be self-reliant and at the same time not independent and jealous ; to score to cry instead of attempting a little hunting on his own initiative, and to hunt truly without skirting or babbling. The natural qualifications of the foxhound, the drive and dash by which he is distinguished above all hounds, fortunately make him an apt pupil if he has an able master, and given plenty of foxes

he will know his work pretty well by the time the regular season opens.

It must again be impressed upon the reader that hounds do not go cub-hunting for the sake of a gallop, though a gallop comes occasionally, and I shall never forget a brilliant twenty-five minutes with an old fox one bright September morning. It was on the moors, and when that old dog fox jumped up in front of hounds there was such a screaming scent that it was impossible to stop them, and very few of us were there when the old dog fox was rolled over. But gallops like this are rare in the earlier days of the cub-hunting season, and men who are on the look-out for gallops such as this are naturally regarded with scant favour by huntsmen, who heartily wish them at home or anywhere else save cub-hunting whilst the earlier education of the young hounds is going on.

The object of cub-hunting is to teach the young hounds to know what a fox is, to teach them to run together, and to rely on each other and on their huntsman. Such being the case, it stands to reason that quietness is imperative on all who go out on these early cub-hunting mornings. There must be no wild galloping to and fro, no noisy holloaing to attract the attention of hounds. As the huntsman is exceptionally quiet himself on these early mornings, so he has a right to expect that all who go out will restrain their ardour, and will assist him when asked to do so. Frequently will they be asked to "hold up" the cubs, and in doing that they will have plenty of opportunity in exercising their vigilance, and they may have a sharp gallop or two as well, as a resolute cub takes some turning. A man who is deputed to this task

should be careful not to leave his post hastily, or he may find that the enterprising cub has taken the opportunity of his absence on a voyage of discovery, and made good his escape. If this should be the case the huntsman may say nothing, but he will think a good deal.

There is another aspect of cub-hunting which is sometimes, especially in the earlier days of the season, apt to be lost sight of. And this is that it is intended to teach the young foxes to go as well as to teach the young hounds to hunt them. For this reason, then, it behoves those in authority to be careful that "holding up" the cubs is not overdone. A fox has a long memory, and after he has been ridden back into covert a few times and escaped, he is apt to rely on "devious courses" instead of speed and pluck to save his life. That there are some foxes spoiled as straight runners is no doubt the fact where cubs are "held up" too much, and for too long in the season. At the same time it requires the greatest discrimination to say when cubs should or should not be "held up."

Cub-hunting certainly tends to the survival of the fittest as far as foxes are concerned, and if it is judiciously conducted, not only will hounds know their business when the 1st of November comes round, but foxes also will be ready to move at the slightest warning that their enemies are in the neighbourhood.

I know one huntsman who is particularly handy during the cub-hunting season, long experience and keen powers of observation enabling him to tell almost by instinct the right moment at which to let the fox break, and there are many throughout the length and breadth of the land who have

equal aptitude. I have known him, after a hard morning's work in the woods, say to his whippers-in, "Let him go next time he tries to break." And then after a scurry of about a mile in the open, he would handle his fox. "It does hounds more good to kill a fox in the open like this than to chop half a dozen in covert," he would say, "but the first fox you let go away like this you must take care to kill."

Some people have an idea that a fox is very easy to kill in covert. There cannot be a greater mistake, as any huntsman of experience will admit, when in the confidential mood.

CHAPTER IX

AN EARLY MORNING IN THE WOODS

Unfrequented woods

I better brook than flourishing peopled towns.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

TIME 3.45 A.M., and a ten-mile ride in prospect to meet hounds in one of their early cub-hunting expeditions on a hot summer morning. The waning moon, now only a crescent, shed a dim light on the road as I started, but the stars were bright enough. There is generally a little chill before dawn, but such was not the case on the morning of which I am speaking. The night had been sultry almost to suffocation, and as I mounted my horse at the hour above mentioned I had the prospect of a long and hot ride before me. As I jogged on through the little town which lay between the trysting place and my home, the careful gasman was beginning to put out the gas lamps, though it was still far from being light. The stones were soon left behind me ; and, by the way, what a commotion you seem to make as you jog through a town where no one, save that careful-minded gasman, is astir. The stones, I say, were soon left behind, and then came a ride through pleasant country lanes. In the fields stacks of golden grain loomed large in the half light, and

the stillness of everything save the thud of my horse's hoofs on the grass was marked.

After a while came the "solemnity of the dawn," and in the dawn came a damp fog, heavy, searching, yet bringing no coolness with it. Cows were now beginning to rise and stretch themselves, and as I crossed the corner of a pasture a couple of young colts galloped up, as if in wonder as to what apparition it was that they saw through the fog. Sheep lay still as I passed them, sure sign of a fine and hot day. But of that, indeed, no sign was required, for the increasing light showed my horse to be steaming with perspiration, though he was in good condition, and I had not ridden him fast.

The scene of the morning's operations was a large woodland, consisting of several hundred acres. It is perfectly level, and somewhat swampy in places. There is plenty of thick covert in it, but it is not all thick undergrowth, and the rides are numerous and wide.

I was first at the trysting place, and I was alone—alone, that is, but for the abundant animal life which was all around me. For the wood was just awakening; within a few yards of me a jay was merrily chattering; rabbits, careless and unconcerned about my presence, hopped about almost within reach of my whip-thong; the small birds were singing cheerfully to welcome the day; an old hare came cantering and blundering along towards me with a fatuity which would have been fatal under other circumstances; a hind trotted quietly through the wood, stopping occasionally to crop the leaves on her way, and finally crossing the ride in which I stood with that easy swinging canter which *looks* so slow till you come to ride beside it.

As she crossed the ride she caught sight of me, but she never increased her pace, and, quietly leaping the fence, made off for the next covert. All was still for a moment, and then came the startled cry of a cock pheasant. What could have caused that evident note of alarm? What, indeed, save the presence of that noble animal the fox, returning homewards from his nightly foraging expedition!

And his quick ears must have caught the rattle of a horse's hoofs coming at a smart canter along the road, a sound which made my horse prick his ears and snort. It is a whipper-in coming on to his "corner," and ere many minutes elapse the cheery "cry" of hounds running with a holding scent told that the disturber had himself been disturbed. There were but seven of us, all told, including the huntsman and his aids, and as each man had his allotted task and the wood is a large one, it is not necessary to insist much on the fact that there was no unnecessary galloping about the rides. Yet how enjoyable such a morning is to the man who can appreciate hound work. You have been standing for half an hour or so, catching, now and again, sounds of the "distant chase." Now you hear hounds turn, they are rapidly approaching you, the bracken stirs a little. Ah, there he goes, over the ride, with ruddy fur and gallantly carried brush, the little Red Rover who may yet save his life by his cunning or his pluck. He makes a short turn in the corner, hounds get a view at him, some tail hounds meet him as he is making the best of his way into the thickest of the covert, surely they have him now. But no, the courage—shall I say the traditions?—of his race come to his assistance; he changes his tactics, and

trusts to his pluck and speed. What cares he now for the whipper-in's "tapping" or the crack of his whip? He has got through the hounds somehow and is off; let us drink his health, and the run which he is sure to give us ere the budding trees and hedges tell that the season of seasons is about over.

Meanwhile hounds, or those which were after the cub in question, have flung themselves back into the wood. Not very far off they hear some of their comrades running hard, and off they go "scoring to cry." You may get away from your various posts now as soon as you like, for the end is not far off. They catch a view at him as he crosses a bit of open ground, but he reaches the thick covert again. But scent serves, they are close at him now, and in another minute they roll him over, after a pretty woodland hunt of an hour. And so home, well content, as one Pepys hath it. And during the hot ride home how the pleasures of memory and the pleasures of hope contend for mastery. Memory tells us of what a good point that promising young hound Fencible made when hounds checked at a ride, and how he ran at head with the confidence of a veteran, and tells us moreover of the way in which the cub broke covert; whilst Hope brings a bright vision before us of the same cub, when skies are grey, crossing the fine grass country which is near his home, with sixteen couples of the bitch pack in his wake, and ourselves as near them as circumstances will permit.

CHAPTER X

A NEW DEPARTURE

“WE have often doubted whether Masters of Hounds like seeing people out cub-hunting or not, and we have about settled the question in our own minds as follows, viz. that huntsmen or Masters who go out early—at daybreak, for instance—are glad to see people, because they are sure that none but sportsmen will come ; whereas the mid-day or afternoon performance favours all the idle, yammering, bothersome, chance medley customers of the country.” So, fifty years ago, wrote the versatile author of *Handley Cross*, than whom no one had a more intuitive knowledge of the component parts of the hunting field and of the predilections and prejudices of Master and huntsman and whipper-in. I wonder what he would have said had he lived to these times, and seen the cub-hunting fixtures advertised in the daily papers.

I think there is not much necessity for me to insist upon the fact that for the majority of people who go out, cub-hunting is just a little bit of a bore, and it is only men who take an interest in hounds, who are enthusiastic admirers of them on the flags and in the field, who feel at all keen about those daybreak gatherings of which Surtees writes.

Many a good sportsman echoes the sentiments expressed by the Squire of Hawbuck Grange: "Cub-hunting is only poor sport to any but the interested," said that keen sportsman. "It resembles the tuning of the instruments for a grand let-off concert, all of which is very right, necessary, and proper, but a sort of thing which the public care very little to hear." Yet more people go out cub-hunting than ever, though it is very evident to a keen observer that at least nine out of ten of them care very little about it.

It is very curious that there should be such a keenness to know where hounds will meet in the earlier days of the cub-hunting season, and even when the hour of meeting is an early one what a large field will draw up! More than once this cub-hunting season I have seen during the month of September and early in the morning, a field which for numbers would not have disgraced December. I think it would not be right to put this down to an increase of knowledge of woodcraft, though it may, perhaps, in some measure proceed from the next best thing, namely, the desire of knowledge.

But whatever may be the cause, there is evidently during the last few years a great increase in the numbers of those who go cub-hunting. And during the last two years the cub-hunting meets—all excepting, perhaps, the very first—have in some countries been regularly advertised. Even in the early days of September, when six o'clock in the morning was the hour of meeting, several hunts, instead of sending cards to a favoured few, published their fixtures for the benefit of all whom it might concern. Had this not been done until the second week in October

it might have been better understood by old-fashioned sportsmen, some of whom, it is needless to say, scarcely look upon the new departure with favour. "For," says Beckford, "sport in fox-hunting cannot be said to begin till October, but in the two preceding months it is either made or marred," and I have seen some as good gallops in October as in January, though the country, of course, is rather blind.

One reason, doubtless, for the advertising of the cub-hunting fixture is the convenience of the farmers. It would entail an immense amount of labour to send post-cards to every one whose farm was likely to be visited by the hounds, and even then some one might be missed, and farmers naturally like to have their stock out of the way when hounds are in the neighbourhood, especially when, as in the present day, hounds are attended by a large field. So for the convenience of the farmers perhaps as much as anything the cub-hunting fixtures are advertised.

But those who wish to spend their early mornings in watching the development of the young hounds, and in getting their horses and themselves fit for the more arduous work of the regular season, should not forget that, even though fixtures are advertised, cub-hunting is, after all, and especially during its earlier stages, a private business, and that they are there as privileged individuals.

Therefore they should endeavour as much as possible to assist the huntsman and the hunt servants. They should carefully keep out of the narrow rides in wood and covert, for if a hound comes past them in a hurry it is quite likely that

their horse will kick him, and a hunt servant, galloping past in the execution of his duty, is by no means safe. "Oh, but my horse won't kick," says some one, in reply to whom it may be said that the soberest hunter, when a good deal above himself, as at this time of the year he should be, is never to be trusted. This is one thing which people on steady-made hunters are constantly forgetting, and "I never knew the old horse kick before," won't mend a broken leg or bring a promising puppy to life again.

I can remember the time when the early days of cub-hunting attracted no attention at all, and when few people put in an appearance till the middle of October. In those days in the Hunt with which my lot was cast about twenty cards were all that were sent out, if so many. In later years I should think, though I am not quite certain, that there were at least a hundred, and now the cub-hunting fixtures are advertised. The sending out of cards in a large country no doubt entails a great amount of labour on the huntsman, who generally has it to do, and it is very easy to miss a man, and some people are apt to be touchy when missed. Then again, the farmers like to see the cub-hunting fixtures advertised in their local papers. They say that only the hunting men amongst them get cards; that they seldom know when hounds are coming their way, consequently they cannot be prepared for them by moving any stock which might be in the immediate neighbourhood of the coverts likely to be drawn. There is much in this argument; indeed, it is the only powerful argument in favour of a change of plan which I cannot say that I like.

In the first place, there is a change of principle involved in the change of plan—a change of principle with regard to the relations between the Master and his field. When a card was sent out there was a tacit understanding that the men who went out cubbing went at the personal invitation of the Master, and that they were therefore bound to conform to all the rules and regulations of cub-hunting, and refrain from captious criticism. But once advertise the cubbing fixtures, and the world at large is invited to take part in a business of which few men understand even the rudiments. It is like admitting the public behind the scenes of a theatre, or like a conjuror showing his audience “how it is done.”

Every one knows that cub-hunting has its being only for the education of hounds and foxes ; but what every one does not know is the many minute details which have to be carried out in order to make that education complete and satisfactory. To begin with, the coverts must be thoroughly routed so that the huntsman may know where his foxes are, a knowledge which will prove invaluable later in the season when an afternoon fox is wanted and there is not much time to spare. This, too, teaches all the foxes to go away, and a wood or covert should not be left so long as there is a fox in it. Then it is essential that quietness should prevail, that there should be nothing to take hounds’ attention away from what, though it is our amusement, is to them the serious business of life, and there should be no galloping about. Now it is almost impossible for these conditions to prevail when a promiscuous crowd is assembled at the covert side, and consequently the education of

hounds and foxes can scarcely be expected to be in as forward a state on the 1st of November as could be wished.

An instance occurs to my memory as a fair illustration. Hounds were cubbing in the district in question for the first time, and there was a large field out, eager for a ride. The first covert that was tried held plenty of foxes, and hounds hunted it till there was not a fox left in it. They then went to another wood, and before they had drawn more than a third of it a fox went away. The field was impatient, and there was a holloa, the Master allowed hounds to go to it, and the consequence was a nice little run, which was not needed, and a missed opportunity for the education of foxes, which was. The run concluded, they returned to the same covert, and a similar circumstance took place, and I am quite certain that in nearly half the covert there had never been a hound. Now the huntsman has only a vague idea as to what cubs he has in the covert, and if there were any cubs in it, which seems probable, they have yet to make their acquaintance with their hereditary foes. As the huntsman said to me as we were riding home together, "That's the worst of having these big fields out cub-hunting. They never consider hounds, and they want a gallop." He might have added, "and sacrifice the sport of the best part of the season for the gratification of the moment."

But there is no mistake about it, for one reason and another Masters will continue to advertise their cub-hunting fixtures, and we shall continue to have big fields out cubbing as soon as hounds meet at a normal hour. But it is surely

not too much to ask that those who come out to assist in the education of hounds and foxes should bestow a little thought on the requirements of cub-hunting, and not be *too* keen for an early gallop.

CHAPTER XI

THE LATER CUB-HUNTING

THE cub-hunting season naturally divides itself into two parts. From the middle of August to the end of September, or perhaps to the first week in October, the first part of the cubbing season extends, and by that time the big woods will have been well rattled, the young hounds will have been well blooded and have got to know their work, and the pack be ready for a fresh departure. Especially will this be the case in an early season, when there does not seem to be any likelihood of a return of the hot droughty weather that makes hunting impossible except in the early hours of the morning. There are various opinions as to the proper way in which cub-hunting should be conducted, and some men are very angry at a huntsman for killing a brace or a leash of foxes in the course of a morning's work in the big woods. I am inclined to think that in many countries too few instead of too many foxes are killed during the cubbing, and that as a matter of fact something very like cubbing takes place in them as late as December, when they get into strong covert. An example of this occurs to my memory. There was a certain big wood I know well, which at one time was certainly not rattled as it should have been for some cause or

other ; perhaps the huntsman, who was a good man, was too much inclined to listen to the critics, who are broken-hearted if they see a brace of foxes killed. At any rate he did not half kill the cubs in this great woodland, and the consequence was that when the regular season began there was such a multitude of foxes in it that hounds kept changing from one fox to another throughout the day, and never got away. Then did these gentlemen, and indeed every one, go home as soon as it was mentioned that the wood was to be drawn. A new man came, one that was most persevering in killing foxes at all times and on all occasions, a real "bloodthirsty huntsman," in fact. And here let me remark that if you want an average of good sport you must have a bloodthirsty huntsman and bloodthirsty hounds, or you won't get it. Well, the new man came, and he took his hounds morning after morning into this wood, seldom letting it rest a week, and he killed several brace of foxes out of it. Of course the number of foxes that he had really killed was magnified, but I believe that he got hold of about thirteen or fourteen brace. "Oh," said the grumblers and critics, "this isn't sport. He chops foxes up like rabbit catching. He has been here I don't know how many mornings, and killed sixteen or seventeen brace of foxes ; murdered them, sir ! murdered them wholesale, and now there won't be a fox in the wood." It is always advisable to keep a sharp look-out whenever a man tells you that foxes are scarce, and at any rate I thought it best to have "my eyes skinned" when hounds were drawing a covert which had been so well rattled, and it was well I did so, for no sooner were hounds put into

this wood of many acres than a fox "went away, he was not found," and was killed after running a twelve-mile point. The men who were grumbling instead of minding their work I need scarcely say were left.

When October comes in, and in a forward season a few days earlier, something like the real thing may be indulged in, and if the country is not too well stocked with foxes, must be indulged in if the foxes are to hold out through the season. For foxes certainly do not require so much bustling about to make them face the open when they are not thick on the ground, and the aim of cub-hunting is to teach foxes what is required of them as well as hounds.

The smaller coverts, too, are generally reserved for the latter part of cub-hunting, and from them there is always a better chance of getting a gallop. So though the country is blind enough, and will be until there comes some frost, men take to jumping naturally, and falls are fewer in proportion than they are later in the season. Sport, too, is generally good in October ; better, I fancy, than it generally is during the first few days of November, when the falling leaf affects it considerably, especially in covert. Some excellent runs have been enjoyed, both in the shires and in the provinces, during the latter days of October, and I can call to mind one occasion when something very like the run of the season took place in the middle of that month.

Perhaps the reason that there are fewer falls in the cub-hunting season may be due to the fact that men do not ride quite so jealously as they do later on, that there are not such large fields, and, con-

sequently, not so much crowding and crossing at fences, which are always productive of grief. An experience of my own is worth relating. I was out with a well-known pack, and as they chopped one fox in covert, another brace went away. They were cubs, so hounds settled on to one of them, for no one thought of a cub facing the open so early, and the first time he had been hunted. But the cub was a bold one, and though he ran into an adjacent covert, he did not dwell there, but ran right through, and then a ring over the open which lasted some twenty minutes. The country we crossed was perhaps the trappiest I know. There were very few gates in the line, the fences were thick and strong, and drains, wide and deep, abounded. In some places the drains were on *both* sides the fence, and they were—as I need scarcely add—full of grass and as blind as they well could be. There were about forty people out, and most of them on the ride. Yet there was not a single fall, men kept well to the hounds, and that though the pace was certainly sharp, especially for the last ten minutes. I am quite sure I shall not see that country ridden over again, when the regular season commences, without there being several falls? Why is this? In the first place, I attribute the happy result to the fact that there were no gaps and weak places, than which nothing tends to make a horse more careless. Then again, there was none of that crowding and cutting-in which unfortunately prevails during the regular season, and which is always, more or less, fraught with disaster. And then there was plenty of room. The crowding and cutting-in could be very much lessened, even when large fields prevail, if men

would study the art of riding to hounds a little more closely. The fact that when the country seemed most unfit for riding over there were absolutely no falls is one which may well afford matter for reflection for those rash spirits who take little heed of how they progress so long as they are progressing.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT TO WEAR

Buckskin's the only wear fit for the saddle,
Hats for Hyde Park, but a cap for the chase ;
In tops of black leather let fishermen paddle,
The calves of a fox-hunter white ones encase.

EGERTON WARBURTON.

TEMPORA mutantur nos et mutamur in illis, a saying familiar to triteness, is as applicable to hunting fashion as it is to everything else in this world, and the fashion of the present day is as different to that of the days in which Egerton Warburton wrote, as was the fashion in his day to that when our forefathers rode out in "broad-lapped coats, top-boots, black cap, and a pigtail sticking out." What to wear in the hunting field is a question of no small importance, as health, comfort, and even safety depend in no small degree upon well-fitting garments. Time was, and that not so very long ago, when breeches were made so tight that a man could scarcely stir when he fell, and these were by no means conducive to safety. They also were sooner wet through than the roomy garments which are now in wear. The single-breasted frock coat which was the fashion in the beginning of the century is now again the vogue, though in a modified form, and shorter in the skirt, and a

sensible coat it is, much to be preferred for comfort to the cut-away ; whilst as for the buttoned-up "swallow tail," however men came to hunt in such a coat is one of those puzzles of which the solution is hard to find. They certainly look smart enough, but on a wet day they afford no protection to the thighs, and are cold and comfortless. Curiously enough, some good sportsmen still stick to them, prompted thereto doubtless by some happy association of ideas.

A hunting cap, save in some few countries, is now never worn in the hunting field, the silk hat taking its place. Probably the hat came into favour through the fatal accident which happened to the Marquis of Waterford, whose death was supposed to be due to his having worn a cap. That a cap is a very useful and comfortable head covering in a woodland country, where a tall hat is constantly getting into the way amongst the branches, every one who has worn them will allow, but concussion is supposed to be less liable to take place if a hat is worn, and a man's neck is also considered safer. I don't know that there is anything in this. Poor "Bay" Middleton was wearing a high hat when he broke his neck. After all, I think the hat is worn for fashion's sake more than for safety's, and many Masters of Hounds do not like to see their followers wear the velvet cap. I remember on one occasion when the question of the members of his hunt wearing caps was mooted to a well-known Master of Hounds, his reply was : "Well, gentlemen, there is no law to prevent you wearing velvet caps if you like to do so ; only if you do I shall put my men into white hats."

This seems to be the prevailing feeling amongst

Masters of Hounds, so unless a man belongs to a country where caps are the fashion he should conform to the wishes of the Master, and wear a high hat. And this brings me to another part of the subject—the wearing of mufti. There is no doubt that mufti is exceedingly comfortable, and the brown cords and black boots make a very serviceable dress. But a man should no more think of hunting in mufti after the regular season sets in than he should think of going out to dinner in a suit of dittoes. It is a mark of respect to the Master to come out in the orthodox scarlet or black coat and top-boots, the breeches being either white or drab as is the fashion of the hunt with which a man casts in his lot. One thing, however, is certain, white breeches are never wrong. Leathers are not worn nearly so much as they were at one time, and though they certainly are the smartest of anything in appearance, and are comfortable enough to ride in in fine weather, they are miserable wear when wet through, and are conducive on these occasions to severe colds, rheumatism, and other ills.

It may be said with some degree of truth that in the present day hunting men dress more with a view to comfort than smartness, though doubtless some young friends of mine will give a deprecatory shrug to their shoulders when they read this. Still, I think I shall have no difficulty in maintaining my position. The roomy broad-skirted frock-coat, though convenient and comfortable, and eminently the right thing in the right place, especially on a wet day, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called smart, neither can the roomy nether garments which are the

object of so much solicitude, on occasion, to the wearer. For I think most of my readers will bear me out when I say that a pair of really well-cut breeches is the scarcest article of attire in a man's wardrobe.

Seldom in these days is it necessary to point out the bad taste of coming out hunting in top-boots and a coloured tie, or in top-boots and a drab shooting-jacket. I have seen a man out hunting in white cords, top-boots, a drab jacket, and a velvet cap, and on my inquiring as to who he was, I was informed that he was the groom of a *nouveau riche*, who did not subscribe to the hounds. Perhaps the most eccentric get-up I ever saw was that of a young man who was busily engaged in sowing his wild oats, in which occupation he was eminently successful. On one occasion he appeared at the crack fixture of the hunt in which he resided attired in dress trousers, scarlet coat, and the light drab forage cap of a Volunteer officer in the early days of the Volunteer movement. He was a strange and wonderful sight. Is it necessary for me to add that after a fox was found he was not seen long?

CHAPTER XIII

HUNT UNIFORMS

The appearance, what is it without the reality ?
And what were the reality without the appearance ?

GOETHE.

WHEN Carlyle undertook to expound the philosophy of clothes he appears to have considered the question of hunt uniforms as altogether beneath his notice, and the question is one which perhaps does not call for much discussion. Still, it is a subject which may be worth a moment's thought, were it only because, as a good sportsman once said to me, it is a matter of individual taste as to whether a man conforms to *les convenances*.

And, after all, it is a matter of some importance to all of us that the people with whom we consort regularly should possess sufficient good taste to conform to the ordinary usages of society, and that they should not possess that vulgar self-assertion which prompts some men to fly in the face of the recognised custom simply because it is a recognised custom.

But it is not of the costume of men in the hunting field that I wish to speak on this occasion, but rather of the dress uniforms of hunting men.

And I am prompted to write about this the rather that hunting men in the Shires have been rather exercised in their minds—at any rate, some of them have—by the fact that the Leicestershire Golf Club has adopted the orthodox pink of the hunting man for evening wear. Now, with all respect to my golfing friends, I think it would have been better that they should not have adopted the dress uniform which has become to be considered as especially the fox-hunter's, at any rate, in Leicestershire. Mind, I do not for a moment wish to insinuate that the hunting man has a prescriptive right to scarlet as a dress uniform, but it has been so long identified with hunting in the Midlands that it seems a pity that it should become associated with any other pursuit in a district where hunting reigns supreme. Scarlet has of course been the uniform in which golfers have appeared on the links in Scotland for more than a century, and so, of course, the golf players have in a certain measure custom on their side, though I never heard of any special evening dress being worn by a golf club until now.

There are some curious hunt uniforms, and though none that I know of come up to the sky-blue coat and canary-coloured shorts of the famous Handley Cross Hunt, there are some which somehow remind one instinctively of livery. The dark green coat with scarlet collar, which was the dress uniform of a certain hunt with which I am acquainted, looked rather curious when it was strange to one, though, when a scarlet silk facing was added, it was becoming enough. Another uniform which was much beholden to its silk facings was a dark blue with white collar. I do not know

whether the members of the Berkeley Hunt wear the orange tawny as evening dress, but if they do it will certainly have rather a peculiar effect, as would the mustard-coloured coat and scarlet collars and cuffs (or was it *vice versa*) of a now defunct hunt had they ever been donned as evening wear.

After all, I am inclined to think that this matter of dress uniforms may be overdone, but it is perhaps a sort of protest against the sombreness of our nineteenth-century evening attire. For instance, if a golf club, why may not a cricket club or a football club, or even a chess club, have its dress uniform? It is only a matter of taste, but fortunately so far we have been spared the infliction.

The scarlet dress coat of the hunting man has been so long in evidence that people had got used to it, and it may be at once admitted that there is nothing so becoming to the hunting man in an evening, it being far before any of the elaborate combinations of colours to a few of which I have alluded. Different coloured collars or facings, of course, are desirable in some cases to identify the hunts to which the wearers belong, but a plain scarlet looks the best in the end. What was the origin of hunting men wearing scarlet evening dress unless it was a survival of those days when hunting men dined as they had hunted, in all the glory of the war-paint, I am unable to say, but it has been a long-established custom, and as such it is entitled to respect.

Still, the evening hunt uniform has its abuses, and it is for that reason, perhaps, that many hunting men fight shy of wearing it. One or two

curious instances have come under my notice. For instance, I have seen a man resplendent in scarlet at a great function who only went hunting in a carriage, and not often then, who did not own an acre of land in the hunt, and who subscribed the minimum subscription for the purpose of attending the hunt dinner and wearing the hunt uniform. Worse than that, there were shrewd suspicions that foxes were safer anywhere than on the shooting which he rented. When I saw that individual it struck me that if I had been wearing the hunt uniform myself the incongruity of the situation would have been painful, for I should have thought *one* of us was making a mistake. I once knew even a worse case than this. The gentleman in question, who was wearing his smart coat for all the world as if he were a first flight man, and whose conversation was of hunting and nothing else—a *réchauffé* indeed of the sporting papers—had never been on a horse, had not, nor was he ever likely to have, an acre of land in the country, and really took no interest in sport of any kind. Evidently here was a case of bad taste on some one's part—probably on the part of more than one or two. So, though I must own that I like to see the scarlet, black is perhaps the safest wear, especially as the example of the golf club may be followed by cricket and football clubs, and a plethora of fancy colours result.

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW HINTS

Just hint a fault.—POPE.

It is one of the most palpable things to a man who keeps his eyes open to things which are going on in the hunting field, that from utter thoughtlessness men are continually spoiling their own sport, or causing needless friction, which brings trouble on those who have the management of the hunt to look after. And strange as it may seem, this thoughtlessness is on the increase, and so much so that in some countries the consequence is serious. A very frequent cause of trouble begins on riding to the meet. A cheery band of sportsmen take a short cut through a covert, thereby saving, perhaps, half a mile, or even less. They chatter away heedlessly, and their noise arouses the vigilance of the fox, who has already received a warning that things are not quite as they should be from his standpoint, by finding his earth closed. As soon as he hears the voices of his noisy enemies he puts this and that together, and quietly jogs away from the covert to some snug place he wots of. Then when the covert comes to be drawn an hour or two afterwards, there is a stale line out of it; hounds run it for a field or two, and then it is

given up as hopeless, and the huntsman's imprecations, if not uttered above his breath, are deep and hearty. For it is always the best foxes that lie lightly, and very little will disturb a fox that has been well hunted a few times. Equally fatal to sport is the assembling of a crowd of foot people at the edges of a covert in the day's draw. The chattering, smoking, eager crowd give the fox ample warning of what is going to happen, and by the time the covert is drawn he has gone miles. Several times have I seen what might have turned out an excellent day's sport spoiled in the manner indicated, and though I am not an advocate for meeting at one place and drawing another country altogether, I am bound to admit that Masters will be obliged to adopt that plan if there is not an improvement. I would point out that there is no excuse for mounted sportsmen doing this very unsportsmanlike thing, and a quarter of an hour's earlier start, which would not entail any hardship on any one, would entirely obviate any necessity there might be for taking short cuts.

Another thing in which men seem determined to do their uttermost to spoil their own sport is by pressing hounds unduly when they check. No sooner do hounds throw up their heads and the huntsman takes hold of them to cast them than the eager field follow him in his cast instead of standing still as they ought to do. And remonstrance in many cases does but little good; men stand still, it is true, till the huntsman gets a few yards farther off them, and then they move on just the same, and the moment a hound hits off the line, or they think that a hound hits off the line, they are on the top of the pack, and cause in many

cases the fox to be lost altogether. When hounds check it is impossible to be too still or too silent, for at these times the least thing distracts their attention; and above all things at a check the huntsman should have plenty of room. This seems so obvious that it becomes a truism; yet day by day and every day we see this rule infringed, and it is no uncommon thing to find that when the few leading men have pulled up at a check they are passed by a crowd of eager sportsmen who have been riding behind them, and who improve the occasion by riding into the middle of the pack, and probably interfering with their original cast.

A very reprehensible practice is larking. Neither is it a very sportsmanlike one. Farmers and landowners may heartily welcome the hunting man and yet have a very strong objection to the making of short cuts on a homeward journey. The one is a legitimate pursuit; the other is neither more nor less than trespass of an indefensible character. One of the best sportsmen I ever knew was exceedingly angry if any one did any larking on his property, and I shall never forget how he rated a party of hunting men for larking over and breaking down his fences as they were going home from hunting, after they had received hospitable entertainment at his hands. Not very long ago I was present when hounds met on a frosty morning. The ground on the morning in question was perfectly rideable, that is, the crust of the frost broke through with the weight of the horses, but the frost was so sharp that hounds' feet would have suffered very greatly had they hunted, and probably half the pack would have been lamed.

As soon as ever it was determined not to hunt, men began larking all over the place, and one party started off, taking the country before them, jumping the fences more or less cleanly, here perhaps breaking a rail, there knocking through some dead hedging, damage which would have been perfectly legitimate had hounds been running, but which certainly annoyed the occupiers of the land, and justly so, in my opinion. And then the offence was aggravated by the fact that the delinquents were strangers, men who did not subscribe to the hunt or own a yard of land within its limits. It is probable that they did not do so very much harm, but that is beside the question. It is also probable that if the farmers had been politely asked, their consent would have been freely given for the larking gallop. But they were not asked, and as an Englishman naturally resents a liberty, there is not the slightest doubt that they would sooner have seen a field of two hundred crossing their land after hounds than the three or four men, whose faces were unfamiliar and whose names unknown, who took it upon themselves to ignore their rights.

CHAPTER XV

WHERE TO HUNT

Play the good husband at home.

The Taming of the Shrew.

THE great question with many sportsmen as the season approaches is, "Where shall I hunt?" and the fitting answer to most of them is, "Hunt from home." The young man's fancy, if his purse be long and his courage be high, lightly turns to thoughts of the Shires, and that he should wish to have a season or two in the galloping countries of the Midlands when in the heyday of youth is only natural. Nor is there any reason why he should not have his season or two in the Cream of the Shires, and pit himself and his horses against the best horsemen that the country or, for the matter of that, that the world can produce. But as a man's responsibilities increase it becomes his duty to hunt in the neighbourhood of his own home if any decent hunting can be got there, and this for many reasons. To begin with, an ounce of practice is worth a pound of theory, and if those whose stake and interest is in a country go elsewhere for their fox-hunting, preserve game strictly at home, and don't care very much about the show of foxes on their estate, they are doing infinite

harm to the sport they profess to love, and I must say it, at the risk of giving offence, their selfishness is much more apparent than their sportsmanlike feeling. There is also a great charm in hunting from home. A man's business and his social ties and social duties then never fall into arrears. He can get, provided that his home is in a fairly good hunting country, the maximum of sport at the minimum of cost; he is enjoying his sport amongst friends and neighbours, most of whom he has known from his boyhood; every covert and every field brings to mind its pleasing reminiscences of sport, reminiscences which never pall, and as he rides home after some good run he can chat with an old friend about a similar run which took place over the country long years before, talk over its similarities and its difference from the run of long ago, and call to mind the doings of more than one favourite hound, *i.e.* if he be a man who cares for anything more than the mere ride.

In most districts it is possible for a man to get a day or two in the week with neighbouring packs, and so well is the country hunted nowadays that in many places a man can choose a fresh pack every day. Speaking from a pretty long experience, I am convinced that a man sees the best average of sport when he takes the bulk of his hunting with one pack, taking the rough with the smooth. On many occasions I have known runs over the cream of the country take place from the most unlikely fixtures, and I have seen more than one wild hill fox found in his native haunts and die in the open, as good 'uns should do, after a good forty or fifty minutes over the

best of the country. Think what misery it is to miss such a run as this ! The best of the country and no crowd !! I have a strong recollection of missing the run of the season with the Cottesmore, and though during the season in question I had rather more good luck than usual for a man who goes from one pack to another, I remember that disappointment more keenly than all the good sport I saw. For it was an opportunity which may never occur again. The meet was Tilton Wood, the journey a long one, and the morning uninviting, so, quoting Lord Albanley, I said, "Up Tilton Wood, and down Tilton Wood, and d—— Tilton Wood," and I hunted elsewhere, choosing an open country, where there was no woodland. We had a gallop ; the Cottesmore got right on the back of a flying fox, ran him over the cream of the Quorn country, and killed him in the open at the end of an hour's fast gallop.

But though I advise my readers to hunt from home, and as much as possible to identify themselves with one pack of hounds, sure as I am that by doing so they will get the most fun out of their hunting, I by no means wish to imply that they should never pay a visit. Spend a fortnight or three weeks in another country, the shires for choice, if your fancy lies that way, or have an occasional day with a neighbouring pack. Probably when you have made elaborate arrangements, and put yourself to some inconvenience to pay your promised visit you will find sport to be of the worst, foxes bad to find, and scent worse than indifferent. But even then you will have had the pleasure of meeting your friends in another country, of comparing notes with them, and if you have kept your

eyes open you will have learnt something. There are some Masters of Hounds who are such curmudgeons that they do not like to see a stranger out with their hounds, but luckily such round pegs in square holes are the exception.

Of course, there is the visitor and the visitor : the man who ranges from one country to another and who subscribes in none—for him no snubbing is too severe ; and the man who does his duty in his own country and who pays a visit in a friendly way. The latter is generally sure of a hearty welcome, and I remember well on one occasion a well-known Master of Hounds, as good a sportsman as ever carried horn at saddle-bow, saying to his huntsman at three P.M., “ We will draw ——,” naming a covert three miles off, a sure find, “ if our visitors will go with us ; if not, we will go home.” Need I say that we went, and that we had a run ? But the pleasure of these visits is considerably enhanced when they take place at rare intervals, and this is one more reason why I say to those who want to enjoy the best that fox-hunting has to give, “ Identify yourselves with one pack, and HUNT FROM HOME.”

CHAPTER XVI

SYSTEMS OF HUNTING

I wish
You had only in your silent judgment tried it.
The Winter's Tale.

MORE or less of a controversy exists amongst hunting men as to the best method of hunting hounds, and even those who care little for hounds and hound work will be found giving their opinion in no measured terms on the subject. It is something like the controversy between Finger and Fist in Whyte-Melville's charming book, *Riding Recollections*, for there are hard-and-fast adherents to each system, and I suppose there will be so long as fox-hunting exists. The two systems may, for the present purposes at any rate, be termed the noisy system and the silent system. Men who like the latter are much put out at the constant holloaing and horn-blowing which form features of the former school; their opponents say that hunting with them is like going to a funeral.

Now in order to come to right understanding on this subject, it is necessary to begin at the beginning and see what are the objects which every huntsman should have in view when he goes out with his pack. First of all, of course, he wishes to show his field sport, to which end it is necessary

that his hounds should be well broken and handy, and that he should have given his foxes a liberal education during the cub-hunting season. Secondly, in the interest of his hounds, he should endeavour to handle at least one fox per diem ; for if sport is desired hounds must be kept in blood. What then is the best way in which to arrive at these very desirable conclusions ?

It is above all things necessary that hounds should be handy ; they must turn to their huntsman ; their attention must be directed to him, and to him alone, when they are not on the line of a fox, and it may be admitted that if hounds know what their huntsman wants them to do, and do it, the first great point is gained. This is the great argument of those who hold with what they term the cheery system. "Look at Tom Blowhard's hounds," say they. "Why, when Tom holloas and blows his horn, they're all round him in a crack, and no hounds could run better than they last week. Forty minutes over grass is good enough for us," they add with the virtuous air of men who know they have done their duty in a quick thing ; and if you should quietly hint that all could have been done just as well with less holloaing and horn-blowing, they will look sceptical.

Personally I must own myself an adherent of the silent system, and the longer I hunt the more convinced I am that noise loses more foxes than it kills. To begin with, the foxhound is highly bred and naturally excitable ; he is in the best of condition, and under these circumstances he must do something. If his excitability is kept under control by a quiet man he is the most teachable of animals. But a noisy huntsman encourages the excitability

of his nature, and tends to make him wild. Speaking from my own experience, I have seen a much greater tendency to run after currant jelly when there has been a long draw, in countries where a huntsman is always holloaing and always "playing on his horn." Then again, a noisy huntsman is apt to be a very excitable one ; he is apt to want to catch his fox himself, to cast his hounds too fast, and to gallop forward on many an occasion and leave his run fox behind him. In a country full of foxes he frequently would leave one fox behind him and get on the line of another, and so have his hounds running all day, and perhaps have to go home without blood at night. On a bad scenting day—and every hunting man knows that bad scenting days prevail—he will give his field plenty of galloping and jumping, but his hounds will seldom be on the line of a fox. This, no doubt, suits some people, but it may well be questioned whether it is of advantage to hounds and sport.

But there is another and a worse side to the picture than this. As I pointed out, the great thing is that hounds should understand what their huntsman wants them to do and do it. And there are many admirable huntsmen who belong to what for want of a better word I have called the noisy school. But a noisy huntsman invariably makes a wild field, and when there is a wild field on a bad scenting day, a field each individual member of which wants to hunt the fox which *he* has seen, the result is chaos.

I will give an instance. A huntsman I knew was deservedly well liked by all with whom he came in contact. He was a good man on the flags, and his pack was a credit to him. He was a

fine horseman, with a capital nerve ; he understood hunting and the run of foxes ; he was very quick, but he was noisy. One day when I was hunting with him stands out as a forcible example of the error of the system for which he is an advocate. In the morning we had a very trying run, from the huntsman's standpoint. Hounds had run hard for ten minutes ; then came a check, and then the fox took a line over bad scenting ploughs, and though there was more of the holloa and horn than I liked, there could be no mistake about the hounds being well handled, or that they came readily enough to the huntsman. Eventually hounds lost their fox, and we found another in a very short time. The huntsman was as quick as lightning in getting away, and in the art of getting a start with his fox he required no instruction. With a holding scent hounds ran on for about an hour and a quarter, and they were getting close to their fox when a plantation of some half a dozen acres loomed in view. Into this plantation the fox went, hounds hard at his brush. Now it so happened that we were in a country where foxes were plentiful, and hounds were no sooner in the plantation than a fox showed himself on one side of it and went away, and was of course well holloaed at by those of the field who saw him. Other two foxes went away with the same result, the huntsman, of course, not seeing any of them. But he began to blow his horn, thinking that one must be his run fox, and the result was that as hounds overshot the line he got their heads up, and they set off for him. Meanwhile the run fox broke at the low end of the covert. The huntsman was quick enough in getting his hounds on to the right line, but the mischief was done, hounds had got

their heads up, and after running over a field they overran the line, flashed forward, and ultimately lost their fox. Now if the silent system had prevailed, no notice would have been taken of any of the holloas so long as hounds were running. They would have come out of covert close at the brush of their fox, and if they had not killed him before he made the sharp turn down a thick hedgerow which saved his life, they would have spread themselves with their noses to the ground when the check came, instead of flashing forwards to look for their fox. Hounds were not to blame, inasmuch as they hunted steadily enough till the noise got their heads up, and caused them to become excited, and then they simply did not hunt with the perseverance they should have shown. Nor was it to be expected of them under such circumstances. Depend upon it that the silent system shows more sport and kills a better percentage of foxes than the other, and it is, moreover, founded on the soundest principle—the principle that it is impossible to kill a fox without hounds.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRESERVATION OF FOXES

The man we'll all honour, whate'er be his rank,
Whose heart heaves a sigh when his gorse is drawn blank.

So sang that excellent sportsman and elegant poet Egerton Warburton many years ago, and "so say all of us." But unfortunately in these latter days, and in some countries I wot of, if the owners of certain coverts were to act as the good fellow did to whom Egerton Warburton calls on us to drink a "quæsitum," there would be a breeze approaching in violence to an equinoctial gale. I very much fear that in many districts the preservation of foxes is not carried on in that whole-hearted manner in which it was a few years ago. Men even who call themselves hunting men, men who appear at the covert side and who look and talk as if they like hunting, have been known to put their shooting in front of it, and sacrifice the more popular sport to the more selfish one by not allowing coverts to be drawn until after a certain date, thereby causing great inconvenience to the Master, and doing themselves no good. Especially is a certain class of shooting tenant given to this manner of procedure, and in his case generally there is not the number of foxes which there ought

to be, neither are they of the right sort. Now I am not for a moment wishful to infer that this shooting tenant does not wish to have foxes in his coverts. He says he does, and as he is in other respects a good fellow—mind, I am not taking into consideration the pot-hunting shooting tenant who takes, with two or three more of his kidney, as much shooting as any one will let to him, and kills everything he can eat or sell,—we are bound to believe him. Yet what is it that takes place when hounds go to draw his coverts? All during summer you have heard of what fine litters of foxes he had. When hounds go they find three or four foxes ; in exceptionally favourable circumstances there may be half-a-dozen. A cub-hunting sort of day ensues, foxes hang to the woods, and those that are killed—there are sure to be one or two killed—are, as might have been expected, cubs. On a second visit a fox takes to the open, he rings about, seldom getting more than a couple of miles away, hounds get a view at him, and roll him over—a cub. And the consequence of this is that some parts of the country get unduly ridden over, that a good deal of damage is done to crops and fences in a certain locality, and that the farmers not unnaturally get annoyed. But let us inquire the reason of this change for the worse, for in many countries I know it is a change. In the first place I attribute it to the want of knowledge of woodcraft in the master who rents the shooting. He has all the country instincts, he was perhaps brought up in the country, but he has had to make his living, and ultimately his fortune, “in crowded city pent.” He may have kept up a certain amount of mechanical skill in his hardly-

earned holidays, but he has no knowledge of woodcraft, and he knows it. Worse still, his keeper knows that he knows it, and acts accordingly. He tells his master there are three litters of cubs in the coverts under his charge. He perhaps takes the trouble to show them to him, but he does not trouble himself to say that at least two of the litters will be carefully removed or destroyed, and that as soon as the cubs in the other are able to feed without the vixen, some fine moonlight night she will go out and will return to her offspring no more. Here, in a nutshell, is the cause of so many short-running foxes. They are either removed cubs, which have no dam to show them the way about a country, or their dam has been ruthlessly murdered. And these are the foxes which do the most damage in the poultry yard. They have not the hunting faculty so strongly developed as the fox that has been taken by his dam in her nocturnal rambles, they are idle and unenterprising. For though a fox is an animal of prey, it must be admitted by all who have made a study of his habits that he prefers to hunt for it.

In the first place, if the shooting tenant wishes to have both foxes and game, it is a very simple matter, provided he is firm about it. Foxes and pheasants may not live in harmony exactly, but there can be foxes in sufficiency, good wild foxes brought up wildly and as foxes should be, and as much game on a place as any man has a right to keep, bearing in mind the rights of the farming tenant. This is a first principle, from which there is no getting away. The best game estate I know—I was almost saying the best in England, and it certainly is one of the best—is never scarce

of stout wild foxes, which puzzle a good pack of hounds to catch them. And what is the secret? An able head keeper, who thoroughly knows his business, and who is not only not afraid to work himself, but takes good care to keep no drones amongst his underlings. For it certainly entails a little more trouble on Mr. Velveteens to furnish both foxes and game in plenty. But then it is what he is paid to do, and if he does not do it he should be promptly sent about his business. Nor does it do any harm to the best of covert shooting for hounds to be run through the coverts before they are shot. If there are foxes, as there ought to be, they ought to be disturbed in order that they may know their business. Besides which, idleness is the sure forerunner of mischief, and idle foxes are the most mischievous of their kind. An odd pheasant may perhaps not get back after hounds have been through the coverts, but it will only be an odd one if the keeper does his duty. And against this is the set-off that hounds make pheasants rise, and that where pheasants are very thick on the ground this is what they do not always do. Of course I do not for a moment suggest that hounds should draw or even be permitted to run into a covert if it can be avoided when a shooting day is near at hand; but my contention is that foxes and game can live together, and that hounds can draw coverts before they are shot without doing any harm, if the keeper is worth his salt.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUNTSMAN

A view of his coat is our beacon, the sound of his horn is
our call,
But his cheer to the hounds when he's near us—ah! that
is the sweetest of all.

The Poetry of Sport (Great Guns).

It has been said that a huntsman is always in the estimation of his field either a heaven-born genius or a fool. As a matter of fact, in the majority of cases he is neither. He is merely a man possessed of ordinary intelligence and keen powers of observation, who has received a good training in his profession, and who is capable of fulfilling the onerous duties which attach to it. There are huntsmen to whom the word “genius” might be fitly applied; there are also huntsmen who may justly be termed incapable, but the numbers which fill either rank are few indeed. Geniuses in any rank of life are necessarily few, whilst incapable men naturally drift out of a profession for which they are unfitted.

Even if a huntsman is the keenest of the keen as a sportsman—and this is by no means always the case, for there are respectable and capable hunt servants to whom the word “sportsman” is scarcely applicable—a huntsman's lot is by no means a bed

of roses. He has to work long hours, and to work hard, his duties are nearly as onerous in the summer as during the season itself, and it is very much open to question whether ten per cent of those who hunt ever give a thought to them, or to the responsibility which attaches to the man whom they criticise so freely and so unfairly. To begin with, there is the entry to look after, and that is no little matter when some fifty to sixty couples of puppies are sent out to walk. The drafting is a serious business, and on the manner in which it is carried out does the effectiveness of the pack depend in no small degree. The breeding of the hounds, too, entails considerable thought on the part of the huntsman, and the puppies at walk are the subject of his constant care. Then there are the hounds to exercise and condition, in itself a science ; so that before ever the huntsman takes the field he has plenty of work, and that of an arduous nature.

To give his critics their due, they seldom find fault with the hounds, the way in which they are bred, drafted, or conditioned, for the very best of all possible reasons, that they know nothing whatever on the subject, and are conscious of their ignorance.

But once let the huntsman take the field, and the floodgates of criticism are launched at his unfortunate head. A frequent subject of fault-finding is, that he does not blow his horn when his hounds go away. Now frequently the field carefully places itself on the upwind side of the covert, and instead of attending to the business of the hour, spends its time in the pleasant occupation of coffee-housing. The delinquencies of Ministers,

the last big shoot, the Derby favourite, any and every subject is discussed and thought of save the "Little Red Rover" who is just now making up his mind how to reach the distant point he has in his eye. Now a good fox "takes no thought about the *order* of his going, but goes at once," as soon as the coast is clear ; and if a huntsman means to handle a good fox, it is necessary that he should get away on the top of his back. So he gets his hounds together, gives a few blasts on his horn, crams it into the boot, and rattles along in the wake of his hounds intent on the business of the day. The field in a few moments arise to the situation, and set off in wild pursuit, grumbling at the huntsman's jealousy. "I did blow my horn, sir, didn't I?" once asked a well-known huntsman of me as we rode together. But it was no use my telling the field that he had done so. *They* hadn't heard him—if he had blown his horn they *must* have heard him ! Such was the argument. He had really been good enough to hear when one was out of earshot of the chatter of some two hundred people who were attending to *everything* but what they should have been. Mind, I don't say that there are not huntsmen who go away without blowing their horns, and who like to slip away with their hounds alone ; but I would point out that it is *impossible* for a man to hear the horn if he persists in keeping upwind of the huntsman.

A huntsman is generally either too quick or too slow. If he holds his hounds sharply on the line which he knows by their manner that his fox has taken, he is accused by the knowing ones of lifting them. Yet the least knowledge of woodcraft and attention to what was taking place would

have convinced the critic that hounds *had a line*, and that the huntsman was simply encouraging them in well-doing.

"Why doesn't he?" is a question which is asked in the hunting field with a frequency which becomes monotonous. "Why doesn't he get on?" asked an impatient man, who had gone well in a sharp burst, and who had not got *quite* to the end of his horse. Hounds had run hard for some fifteen minutes; an over-eager field had pressed them a field over the line, and the huntsman, having made a short cast down wind, was going back to where hounds had last had a line. Of course, the huntsman was right, hounds had overshot the fox, and the latter had taken advantage of the fact to slip down a hedge-back. A curious instance of this took place when Mr. Vyner was hunting the North Warwickshire country. They had run the fox to ground and bolted him, and away hounds went at top pace with the field on the top of their backs. Mr. Vyner followed on quietly, keeping his eyes open, and when hounds checked, as they were sure to do under such circumstances, on a catchy scenting day, he saw the fox had clapped in a fallow, and when hounds were carried on by the impetuosity of the field, he saw him turn and make his way down a hedgerow. He blew his horn, and no doubt the question was asked a score of times, "*Why* is he blowing hounds back? The fox must be forward." Whoo-whoop, at the end of five minutes, answered the query.

It is by no means an uncommon occurrence in some countries for the "young bloods" to vote a huntsman who hunts his foxes perseveringly on a bad scenting day, slow, and many a veteran who

can give his critics heaps of weight at riding is pained by hearing himself called an old fogey, and at hints being given him that he should retire in favour of the first whipper-in, hints which, if not given to his face, are sure to come round to him.

Apart from the fact that this is very bad form, it is unjust. It tends to unsettle a good servant, for the admirers of the whipper-in do not fail to fool him to the top of his bent, and it causes jealousy, and perhaps ill-feeling, where there is no necessity. No man likes to be ousted from his place when he feels himself competent to fulfil the duties of it, and it may be said that no man would have the ill-manners to go into his friend's house and advocate the butler's retirement, and the filling up of his place by the senior footman or the page-boy.

Two instances of the critics saying a huntsman was getting slow and had given up riding, and of their criticism receiving practical refutation as soon as uttered, occur to my memory. On the first occasion the huntsman had been persevering with a bad scent and a twisting fox, and so raised the spleen of the critics. But things took a turn, hounds swam across a brook in flood—twenty feet from bank to bank—which the huntsman took in his stride, and, of course, stopped the field. On the other occasion, hounds were running hard, the fence was impregnable, and a locked chain was round the gate—a high one. So the huntsman jumped it, as a matter of course. “And silenced the critics,” you say. Well, scarcely. The man who was born ten minutes ago and knows all about it, is bad to silence.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WHIPPER-IN

See how Dick, like a dart, shoots ahead of the pack !
How he stops, turns, and twists, rates and rattles them back !
The laggard exciting, controlling the rash,
He can comb down a hair with the point of his lash.

EGERTON WARBURTON.

PLEASE don't call him "the whip"—it is usual but incorrect, and is, moreover, rather slangy. The whip is what he carries in his hand. The huntsman when he criticises his conduct on occasion—and this is by no means so infrequent an occurrence as the uninitiated would think—speaks of him as "my whipper-in," and we may well all follow so good an example.

Perhaps there is not so hard a worked man about the kennel as the first whipper-in, unless it be the second whipper-in, whom I always look upon as being the scapegoat of the establishment. Is a fox inadvertently lost when in the opinion of the huntsman he ought to have been accounted for, it is the second whipper-in who is asked in rather sarcastic manner, why he did not do something or other that he didn't do, and there is no such good schooling for a youngster who is ambitious to make his mark with hounds as being a second whipper-in under a sharp huntsman who

is a good disciplinarian. It is the second whipper-in who, when hounds are wanting at the end of a long hard day, is sent to look them up, with a sharp admonition to keep his eyes open for the future. And though it must be admitted that a little carelessness on his part when hounds are going away from a covert is often the reason why numbers are short at the end of the day, I am always sorry for him when he has those long solitary rides in the dark. But he is young and does not feel the hardship, and doubtless on these solitary rides he builds castles in the air as to what he will do when he himself is on his promotion and carries the horn.

The second whipper-in has plenty of hard work, but the first whipper-in's duties are of a much more important character. The second whipper-in will be told on occasion that he has to do as he is told and not to think for himself; his senior will be asked at times, when things are not going too well, "Why can't he think, and what are his brains for?"

For the first whipper-in has a most important post to fill. If the huntsman must always be with his hounds, the first whipper-in must be everywhere at once. He must keep a sharp eye forrard for holloas and take care, when foxes are numerous and scent serves none too well, that hounds do not change on to a fresh fox. He must always keep well in front whilst hounds are drawing, be at hand to turn hounds to the huntsman if necessary, and yet see that a fox does not steal away unseen, a thing which is not unlikely to happen when a country has been well hunted, unless he keeps a very sharp look-out indeed.

Then perhaps there are some distant earths open, and he must ride his hardest to beat a straight-necked fox to them, a feat in which, try as he may, he sometimes comes off second best. He gets a lot of fun, does the first whipper-in, but he does not get overdone with praise by the huntsman. That worthy takes all his excellent properties quite as a matter of course : " If he wasn't a good man I shouldn't keep him," he argues—not without reason.

I once saw a very good whipper-in in a very good run, a run for which we were in a great measure indebted to him. To begin with, our fox was making for a river which he would undoubtedly have crossed if it had not been that the whipper-in forestalled him, and so our run was saved instead of lost. Several times during that run did I see the whipper-in at a critical point. If hounds checked for a moment it was Sam's holloa that put us right ; when hounds ran through a big wood it was Sam that was there to turn the fox away from the earth, and all went well till just as we thought hounds were killing their fox. They had run a nine-mile point, and looked like running straight into him, and then he began to ring, and just as they were about to kill him he tumbled into an open earth. " Didn't you know that this earth was open ? " said the huntsman with a look that would have killed at thirty yards. " I thought they were killing him, sir," was the answer. " *Thought!*—you should have made sure," replied the huntsman. It may perhaps be thought that the huntsman was a little too severe to his subordinate, but it must be remembered that his omission discounted all his previous smartness, and

was the cause of hounds missing their fox when they thoroughly deserved him. And you may be sure that whipper-in remembered the next time there were any open earths in front of a sinking fox, which he probably might not have done if it had not been for the reprimand.

In the kennel the first whipper-in has to take command when the huntsman is absent on business or from illness, and on occasion, when he is laid up from accident or illness, he has to hunt the hounds. Then comes his opportunity, and if he succeeds in showing good sport there generally comes for him the beginning of better things. And when a whipper-in takes the horn for the first time, the field should be more considerate than they generally are under the circumstances. For the whipper-in is heavily handicapped. He has been accustomed to turn hounds and not to call them to him. He is also working at the disadvantage of having a man short, or if some one is put on to help him, he is unaccustomed to the duties, and the second whipper-in is as strange to his task as his senior is to hunting the hounds. Therefore more room should be given him to make his casts. But this is by no means the case, and generally the wild ones are wilder than ever when the first whipper-in hunts the hounds. A whipper-in once said to me, "I wish Mr. ——," naming the huntsman, "was able to come out again; the gentlemen don't take any notice of me, and I haven't a chance to show sport," and the man looked worried and anxious. Yet he was a very capable man, and made a good huntsman.

The sport depends as much on the skill and ability of the whipper-in as on that of the hunts-

man. Beckford was of opinion that a really clever whipper-in was more indispensable to a pack of hounds than a really clever huntsman, and he was undoubtedly right. But it by no means follows that a good whipper-in makes a good huntsman. I have known several who were marked failures when they came to carry the horn. I have also known many who had no ambition to rise above the rank they occupied. "I would sooner be one of the best whippers-in in England than one of the worst huntsmen," said one of them to me when I spoke to him about a huntsman's place.

CHAPTER XX

RIDING OVER A COUNTRY

SOMEONE has said somewhere that every Englishman thinks it is right to be able to ride and to know something about horses, and that if a foreigner were to question his ability in this direction he would resent it bitterly. The author of the remark was evidently a man of keen observation ; Englishmen tacitly claim for themselves that they are *facile princeps* in the noble art of horsemanship—

Bring Spaniard or Mexican, Cossack or Gaul,
We've a Dick in our village will ride round 'em all,

is the way they complacently sum up the situation. And to a certain extent they are right. In no country under the sun is horsemanship for the pure love of it carried on as it is in the British Islands, and certainly in no country under the sun are such risks run in the more or less successful endeavour “to witch the world with noble horsemanship.”

How that spirit of sport has come to be a part of the national characteristics, how it has grown with the nation's growth and strengthened with its strength, is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Suffice it to say that it has done so, and

that hunting and riding to hounds, or after them, find an increasing number of votaries every year. If any proof of this were required, we have it in the number of packs of staghounds which are to be found in the country, and which seem certainly to be on the increase.

Nowadays, when a man has made money, and looks round for some means of recreation, it is a common thing to find him buy a few horses and commence riding to hounds, especially if he has not passed what Dante calls "the middle house of life." The large fields which we see in every popular country are considerably recruited from the ranks of business men—men who have had little opportunity during their earlier years of obtaining that practice in riding which is necessary to the making of the finished horseman, and yet men who generally acquit themselves with credit, and occasionally with distinction. This everyday experience, I think, is sufficient to show that to Englishmen, Scots, and Irishmen alike, horsemanship somehow comes by instinct.

Yet it is not a little curious that this instinct is very seldom systematically cultivated, that practice is frequently deemed sufficient to make perfect horsemen, and that most men "tumble" themselves into the ranks of the good performers. It is all very well to a lad whose ancestors have from time immemorial lived, as it were, in the saddle, to chuck him on to a pony without stirrups to his saddle, and say, "Now, mind you don't part company." That plan, or want of plan, answers well enough with a youngster who has opportunities of riding in every holidays ; but it is not the way which should be adopted, and which, by

the way, too frequently is adopted, by those who commence to ride later in life.

I am prepared to admit that there is a large proportion of good horsemen in the country. My long experience has caused me to form the opinion that, whilst the brilliant horsemen of the past have their equals in the present, and in increased numbers, what for want of a better term I may call the good average performers are very much on the increase. But do we, as a nation, ride as well as we ought to do? I very much question it. In fact, the falls in the hunting field show, I think, conclusively that we have much to learn, for it must be admitted that many of them are preventable.

Indeed, when we come to look at the inexperience of so large a proportion of those who swell the hunting field, and the badly broken horses that they ride, it is a wonder that serious accidents are not more common than they are. Upwards of sixty years ago a calculation was made, the result of which is as follows : It is 10 to 1 against a man who goes out hunting having a fall at all ; it is 80 to 1 against either himself or his horse being hurt ; it is 480 to 1 against the rider being hurt ; it is 15,760 to 1 against a broken bone, and 115,200 to 1 against fatal accident. A later calculation, which, however, I have not at hand, gives the odds against a fatal accident as 480,000.

But notwithstanding the comparatively small number of accidents which take place, we are constantly hearing of serious accidents in the hunting field, and we may take it for granted that many take place of which we do not hear.

That accidents can be done away with altogether is, of course, impossible, but that something in way of education, both to the horse and the rider, might prevent many of them, I firmly believe. How many a man do we see taken down to a fence by his horse, who is absolutely out of his control; who jumps wildly, and who, jumping still more wildly when heavily blown, ends by giving his unfortunate owner a heavy fall. Then again, we see a man urging his horse at full speed at a fence—the horse probably one of those whose hind legs are a little “away from him,” and who should on that account be ridden in a very collected manner at his fences. But in nine cases out of ten he is not, and the result is disastrous.

Now I am of opinion that if men, and ladies too, who go out hunting were to undertake a course of “school” riding before *they acquire bad habits*, the result would be an all-round improvement in riding. I don’t mean to say that every one would be a brilliant horseman or a brilliant horsewoman, or that every one would have good hands. Good hands, like poets, are born, not made. But those who had bad hands would find them better, they would find their seat stronger, for many a man and many a woman unconsciously fall into a slovenly way of riding, which, in the long-run, is distressing to the horses and tiring to themselves; and, what is even infinitely more to the purpose in riding across the country, they would find the sympathy between their horse and themselves the keener, and the understanding better.

I must say that many of the ways of the *manège* seem to me to be pedantic and unnecessary, but I have no doubt that they all have their uses in

the training of horse and rider, though we do not want to see them exemplified in the hunting field. But the general result of a course of school riding, I am sure, is good, and I commend it to all aspirants to fame in the hunting field. I have, of course, seen school riders whose nerve was not equal to crossing a country, or who, if they got up in a steeplechase, as I have seen them do on occasion, made a very sorry example of themselves. But the best man I ever saw go through a wood was a man who had gone through a course of school riding. His horse and he were as one, and the pace at which he rode amongst the trees made him the envy of all who saw him. In a word, school riding may not be all that is claimed for it ; it may be even pedantic at times ; but it serves to establish a well-defined code of signals between the horse and his rider ; it makes a good horseman better ; it makes a bad horseman into a decent one ; and I think every one will admit that many a fall would be saved if the rider knew how to efficiently " lighten his horse's forehead."

CHAPTER XXI

NERVE

He knows where he's going, and means to be there.

WHYTE-MELVILLE.

NERVE has been defined by the lexicographers as "steadiness and firmness of mind ; self-command in personal danger or under suffering ; unshaken courage and endurance, coolness, pluck, resolution." And it must be admitted that the definition is a good one, covering most of the ground. Yet have I known men who were undoubtedly possessed of all these qualities in a marked degree who were in no way good men to hounds in the general acceptance of the term—who, in other words, were lacking in nerve. And some of these were fine horsemen, too.

It is a curious quality that of nerve. A man's nerve, by which I mean his riding nerve, will go from him in a day ; it will sometimes, but not frequently, come back to him as suddenly as it departed.

Every one who has hunted any length of time and kept his eyes open must be able to call to mind many a man who has commenced his hunting career with apparent enthusiasm, who has gone like the proverbial "blazes" for two or

three seasons, taking croppers as all in the day's work, and then all at once given up hunting altogether because his nerve has gone. He has, perhaps, tried to "go" for a season, enduring unknown tortures in the attempt, and then he has given up altogether. He has never joined the skirting brigade, not, perhaps, as some would suggest, because he was too proud to do so after having once been a first-flight man, but because he did not care sufficiently for hunting.

A curious instance of loss of nerve occurs to my memory, and doubtless some of my readers may know of similar ones. A man, a very fine horseman, gave up really riding to hounds long before he gave up riding steeplechases. One would naturally think that the latter was the more dangerous pursuit of the two, as indeed it is; but the man I have in my mind's eye rode well between the flags long after he had developed one of the keenest eyes for a gap of any man I ever knew.

Professional jockeys, whether on the flat or between the flags, are rarely hard men to hounds, though I have known some notable exceptions—Custance, to wit, R. W. Colling, and Harry Luke amongst flat-race riders, and Knox amongst cross-country jockeys. But this must not be set down to a lack of nerve altogether. In some instances it may be due to this cause, but the principal reason of their not riding hard is of a very different nature. A jockey's time in his profession is naturally a very short one. He has to work hard to keep at a riding weight, and he knows that he must make the most of his time. So, of course, a bad hunting accident, or even a trivial fall such

as the hunting man would not be much inconvenienced by, might mean a serious pecuniary loss to him. Especially is this the case with a steeple-chase jockey, who might be wanted the day after he got his fall, and perhaps he might lose £30 or even more by it. So let not the gay youth who, as he thinks, "cuts down" the veteran steeple-chase jockey say that "the old duffer has lost his nerve."

I have spoken of those men who riding hard for a couple of seasons or so, drop of it altogether. Now I come to a man of very different stamp. He was perhaps never what is called a bruiser, just rode on steadily, always taking a good place, and always keeping it. I knew a man of this kind who was very difficult indeed to tackle for many years; then he lost his nerve, and though he occasionally jumped a fence—even a big one—he never "opened out" as it were. But he loved hunting, and he kept on. I remember him once saying that he had a very good little mare, but she was too quick for him. I rode that mare once or twice and did not find her at all bad to handle. Well, the days of the little mare went by, she was sold or something, and some few years afterwards I happened to meet my friend in the hunting field. Now the horse he was riding was a handful and no mistake. I could see that as we jogged on, after trying the first covert, and I did not expect to see much of my friend after we found. The mare aforesaid was an angel compared with the horse he was riding. We found at last, there was a scent, and I was one of those who got a good start. It was a biggish country we were crossing, gradually getting bigger as we

went on. At the end of a quarter of an hour came a check, and I was somewhat surprised to see my friend amongst us as we pulled up. But my surprise was to be still greater ; hounds hit off the line, and ran down a long field, at the bottom of which was a yawner. Down went my friend at the yawner, which he cleared in gallant style, and he was one of the very few who saw the death of the fox, having gone in front the whole of the way.

He has found his nerve again ! I must add that he was always a fine horseman, and that his nerve has never since failed him.

I once heard a man chaffed for having lost his nerve—rather a heartless thing to do, I think, for it is none too pleasant to know that one has lost one's nerve, and a man always tries to hide it from himself as long as he can. The circumstances were as follows :—The man in question had had a bad fall, but, keen as mustard, he was out again as soon as possible. Hounds were running, and crossed a cramped but soft place, from which there was a sharp climb out. It was a place where an impetuous horse might come to grief, and if, as was the case with the man in question, a man had not the full use of his limbs, he might easily have been seriously hurt. So he turned his horse away from what was little better than a gap—in other words, he funked it. And immediately he was chaffed about his loss of nerve by two or three men who would probably have never got on to a horse again had they had such a fall as he had had, and who certainly would not have ridden hunting so soon after a bad fracture. Hounds did not run long, and when they had killed their fox, they went

into a more open country. Going from one covert to another, they came across a gate which was bad to open, and the men who had been so free with their chaff looked round for some one to open it for them, for opening necessitated getting off into a wet hole. "I'll manage the gate," said the man whom they had chaffed, and riding up to it at a trot he jumped it in his stride. And then he pulled up and "let them have it" concerning their bad manners of the morning. His nerve, it will be observed, was not strong enough to face the cramped place in his then condition, but it enabled him to ride over a gate in cold blood.

"Familiarity breeds contempt," says the old copybook motto, and it is one of the curiosities of riding nerve that a man will go hard in some countries, whilst in others which are very similar he, to use a well-known colloquialism, "will not ride a yard." It is easy enough to understand how a hard-riding man from the shires or any big low country may find himself at a loss how to get to hounds over the stones and bogs of Dartmoor, and it is equally easy to understand how a native of the moors, who will gallop top pace in the heather regardless of holes and big stones, and who will ride along precipitous paths with a nonchalance which is perfectly appalling, will find himself non-plussed when he meets a fairly wide drain with the fence at the landing side. This is good enough to understand. What is not at all easy to understand is the case I put at first, that of a man going hard in one country, and not going at all in one which in every respect is similar. An instance of this occurs to me. The gentleman in question, who apparently has an iron nerve, will in his own

country stop at nothing. His own country, too, is a very big one, one of the stiffest I know, yet there is he always to be seen in the same field with hounds, "always in front, and often alone." He will ride anything, no matter how unhandy, and they all go well with him. I have hunted with him in his own and in other countries, and in the other countries he has been quite another man. In fact, though they were much easier countries to cross than his own, he has never been conspicuously in front. It cannot, in his case, be that "familiarity breeds contempt," though that may well be the case with the ordinary sportsman who goes well in a certain kind of country. What the reason is I will leave for my readers to guess at ; it is beyond me, and I can only state that such is the fact.

A man of a very different type is one who goes well in all countries ; a man

To whom naught comes amiss,
One horse or another, that country or this,
Through falls or bad starts who undauntedly still
Rides up to the motto, "Be with them I will."

Such a man we all know, and perhaps the very best man I am acquainted with, take him all round and in any and every country, claims that he is one of the most nervous men alive. He says that he *sees* every fence, and is always glad when he finds himself at the other side ; though a fine horseman, he hates a fresh horse, and I have heard him "wonder what this brute is going to do next." Yet he will get on to anything, and ride over any country, be it what it will, and right up in front all the way. Were he not the most unassuming man alive, I should put his claim of nervousness down to affecta-

tion ; as it is, I implicitly believe him when he states that he is a nervous man. How, then, account for his being always amongst the choice few who cut out the work ? I attribute this to his strength of will. That he is a fine horseman with seat, hands, and judgment goes without saying, and having these good qualities, he is determined to use them. "I don't like jumping these big rough places," says he to himself, "but I am going to jump them," and he does. Once when in Ireland he asked a friend for a day's hunting with the Ward. The friend had only one horse at liberty, and that horse not a very desirable mount. He could gallop and jump, it is true, but he was not always in the humour, and he had put many a good man "on the floor." There being nothing else for it, he took the "uncertain" horse, and rode out of the town in anything but a comfortable frame of mind. "I don't like this," he said to a friend he met on the road ; "the horse feels as if he were going to do something, and I don't know how or when he will begin." They arrived at the fixture all right, and the stag was enlarged. Now the gentleman in question had never ridden over Meath in his life, and he thought the sooner he got out of or into his difficulties the better. So immediately hounds were laid on he rattled his horse to the front, and in a field or two had got a good lead. The horse, who was a fine jumper and fast withal, never gave him any trouble, and he maintained the lead to the finish, which I should think is a record performance. And this is a man who complains that he is short of nerve. Surely there is nothing so curious about a man as his riding nerve.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO OR THREE POINTS OF ETIQUETTE

IT is not a little singular that points of etiquette in the hunting field have constantly to be brought to the notice of those who "join the glad throng which rides laughing along," and that men—ay, and women too—are guilty of rudeness in the hunting field who are models of courtesy and consideration for others in the ordinary avocations of life. It is that question of consideration for others which underlies all courtesy, and in the hunting field consideration for others is absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of sport. Now in great things, in the more important matters which appertain to hunting, I have no hesitation in saying that this consideration is conspicuous, but in minor matters it is frequently conspicuous by its absence.

Let us take a few cases of what is due to the Master. In the first place, it is bad form for the man who hunts regularly to hunt in mufti. I do not mean that he is always to be *en grand tenue*, but he should not go out hunting regularly in what has been termed ratcatcher costume. It is certainly a slight to the Master and also to the rest of the field. The excuse of the man who goes out regularly in mufti is that it is more com-

fortable than the orthodox costume of the chase. Granted for a moment that his argument is a correct one—and it is certainly open to question—would the same gentleman go to a dinner-party in an old smoking-jacket, which is indisputably more comfortable than the regulation evening dress?

Then it is due to the Master to appear at the place of meeting. There are some men who are very remiss in this matter. To save themselves half a mile's ride they will ride through coverts on the road to the meet, or they will stop at some covert where they think that a Master will draw or ought to draw. This is the worst of bad form. As they ride through the coverts they seldom take care to be silent. They talk and laugh, and smoke cigars, and clash gates, regardless of the fact that all good foxes lie light, and that whilst they are amusing themselves in this fashion the good fox in the covert, put on the alert by finding his earth stopped, has already taken in the situation, and has carefully made good his escape long ere hounds come to draw the covert. Then when hounds do come, and perhaps own a line here and there, these same men who have done the mischief will discourse learnedly of hound breeding, and tell you that hounds do not hunt as they did, and that the Master is breeding them on wrong lines. It is always the Master, you will note. Not very long since, at a favourite covert which chanced on that occasion to be the second draw, the Master on arrival found half-a-dozen horsemen riding about in the field next to it chatting away gaily. They had disturbed the covert, they had also annoyed the farmer—a very good fellow, by the

way—by riding about in his newly-laid seed field. I am of opinion that the Master would have done quite right if on seeing these people he had “named” them to his field, and stated that owing to their conduct he should spend the rest of the day in the woodlands. I once saw a Master punish the would-be clever members of his field properly. It had become the custom when hounds met at a certain place for many people to station themselves at certain coigns of vantage round the coverts, which I have known to be almost surrounded. The favourite fixture was again selected, and, of course, the coverts were, as usual, surrounded. The Master, however, quietly moved off to the moors, and the lesson has never been forgotten in that country.

There is one more point to which I wish to draw attention. It is the duty of every one to do all in his power to further the huntsman in the pursuit of his duty. Theoretically every one admits that he ought to stand aside for the huntsman. But, practically, how many people *always* make way for him? “Each resolved to be first” is an excellent motto, but it should be borne in mind that hounds without the huntsman are of little use on a bad or catchy scenting day. This is what you will see on occasion. Hounds cross a road, and on getting through the gate out of the road the huntsman wants to jump at right angles into the next field, in order to be with his hounds. He gallops a few yards up the head ridge, and turns round to charge the fence. Instead of his charging the fence he is himself charged by an impulsive hurrying crowd, who see a nice line of gates in front of them. The hunts-

man is bustled about, perhaps his horse's temper gets upset, and in a few fields he falls, with the result that, when hounds check, the huntsman is not quite in the place that he ought to be in. Straightway the huntsman is voted slow, and the Master a duffer for buying such horses, and that by the very men who have caused the mischief. It should be unnecessary to point out that when men ride through a gate, and there is any likelihood of the huntsman—or, for the matter of that, any one else—wanting to jump the fence which runs at right angles, they should pull well out into the field, and that those who prefer to ride through gates and gaps, or to a point, should pull to the outside of those who are riding to hounds, and not gallop against them or between them and the fence they wish to jump.

That good sportsman, "Borderer," amongst the many things which he points out for the avoidance of hunting men, says, "Don't crab your own country, Master, huntsman, or hounds." Seasonable advice this, for it is a mistake which many good fellows make, and which is very trying to the Master when it is brought to his notice, which, sooner or later, is bound to be the case. If you come to look at the facts you will see that in every walk of life the genius is an exception, and that in every walk of life, from statesmanship to skittle-playing, there are plenty of capable men, who, whilst not pretending to genius, can look upon their lives as successful ones in the sphere of action which they have chosen for themselves ; and before you begin to lavish your critical remarks on the action of your Master or huntsman, it is just as well to bear in mind that whilst in all proba-

bility they are neither genius nor fool, they know a great deal more about hunting than you do. One thing which I think is particularly unfair, is that when a man has expressed an opinion unfavourable to a certain line of action which a huntsman has adopted, he continues to express the same opinion after it has been clearly shown to him that the huntsman was right. And I would point out that many a time a huntsman's cast is the correct one, even if it should fail to be successful.

Here is a case in point. Hounds had been running with a catchy scent for some twenty minutes, and they checked. There was a big wind blowing, the bulk of the field were on the right of hounds, and close to the right of the field was a large village. The huntsman made his cast, and immediately his critics began to "ask questions." "Why on earth is Jim going there?" said they. "It is plain that the fox has not gone there." And so it was when Jim had made his cast and failed to hit off the line of his fox. But I wonder what any man who *understood* fox-hunting would have thought of his powers as a huntsman if he had not made a *down-wind cast in the direction* of a well-known covert before doing anything else. The event proved that had he made an up-wind cast he would have hit off, and most likely have killed his fox. What really happened was this: the fox had turned sharply to the right down a deep gutter, eager horsemen had pressed hounds a field over the line; the horsemen who had not done the mischief kept riding on as if all that was to be done to recover the line was to persevere in the direction in which they were

going. The consequence was that the fox slipped back behind them unseen. Had they stood still when the check came they must have viewed the fox, and the result would have probably been a good run under the conditions. In other words, had they devoted as much thought to what their own duty was under the circumstances as they did in wondering why the huntsman did this or the other, their expenditure of thought would have been to some useful purpose. The curious part of the thing is that though it was explained to the critics that the huntsman's cast was a scientific one, in talking of that run they still maintain that "any one could have seen that the fox had gone on to Willingbury Hazels."

Another instance, even more remarkable than the last, occurs to my memory. It was a wild, stormy day, a strong wind fit to tear a man out of the saddle was blowing, and it was almost an impossible morning for hunting. The huntsman was a man with a great reputation—a man who was quite at the top of his profession, but it had become the fashion in some quarters to "crab" him. So a start was made, when he went to the opposite end of the coverts to draw to what was his custom. Of course, had he given the foxes the benefit of the wind, so late as it was in the season, they would have been gone long before hounds could have got near them; but that was ignored, and his method of drawing the country was somewhat severely handled. You see some of the field had stationed themselves at the covert they thought he ought to begin at, and had not taken the trouble to go on to the meet. However, they found a fox, and hunted him for about

half an hour, and then came a check. "Why on earth is he making such a cast? The fox has never gone there," said the chorus when the huntsman took hold of his hounds and made the ground good all round. "It is patent to any one that he went for Switchington Gorse," said one very clever gentleman. But he had done nothing of the sort. He had gone to ground where hounds ceased running, and they had laid at the earth; but the huntsman made the cast to see whether the fox had only tried the earth and gone on, as foxes will do on occasions, or whether he was in it. My firm opinion is that the gentleman who held that Switchington Gorse was the fox's point believes to this day that he went to that famous covert.

Some years ago I was hunting with a famous pack of hounds. It was with our afternoon fox, and scent had changed for the worse, and even on grass hounds could not run. Patiently the huntsman hunted on for upwards of an hour, hounds unable to do more than own a line, and for most of the time they could not speak to it. Then a heavy shower fell, and hounds having worked up to their fox, rattled him along merrily for fifteen minutes, and rolled him over. I expressed my pleasure at seeing hounds hunt so closely and well, and then a gentleman who was present put in a criticism. "You are getting your hounds too light tongued," said he to the huntsman. That worthy made not much reply, but as we rode home together he said to me, *à propos* of nothing in particular, "There's a good deal of ignorance covered by a red coat sometimes, sir."

CHAPTER XXIII

SOME HUNTING CHANGES

THAT hunting is carried on under very different conditions from those which used to obtain is so obvious that it seems unnecessary to call attention to the fact. Yet at times it seems as if benefit is derivable from a comparison with the "brave days of old." For occasionally we hear men say, "Such and such a thing would not have happened fifty or sixty years ago," quite ignoring the fact that fifty or sixty years ago the conditions under which hunting was carried on were so totally different that the comparison does not apply. To begin with, in former times, with the exception of the shires, nearly every man who hunted, hunted from home. He resided within the limits of the pack with which he cast in his lot; the farmers over whose land he rode were personally well known to him; he had an interest and a stake in the country; and in many respects his interests were identical with those of the farmers. These things of themselves tended to make farmers look upon hunting men with more than a friendly eye, and to welcome them on their land with that hospitality which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the English farmer. Now matters have so much altered with respect to the

composition of the field, that it is small wonder that farmers at times look askance and grumble at the damage that is done. The growth of the railway system has enabled men who live in crowded centres to get their hunting far afield; they run down from London to the shires, to Essex, to Berkshire, and other hunting centres, and hunts which now number their fields by hundreds were wont formerly to number them by scores. It has been said by some that no man should hunt save he who owns or occupies land, but that is manifest of so churlish a spirit that it is not worth consideration. True, in the early part of the century and pre-railway days the bulk of the fields consisted of men who lived on the land or by the land, but it has been one of the great principles of fox-hunters to welcome every man as a brother sportsman, no matter what his rank and calling, so long as he conducted himself in a sportsmanlike manner. At the same time it must be recognised that the introduction into the hunting field of merchants, tradesmen, and professional men in large numbers is a source of danger to hunting. Naturally they know little about country life; their lives have been spent amidst the bustle of noisy cities, and they are likely to err frequently from ignorance and to do harm unwittingly. They may, however, soon learn to discriminate between new seeds and a two years' clover ley, and learn how to avoid riding over crops which are damageable, and that without losing their place in a run. But equally important as the avoidance of doing damage is the cultivation of friendly relations with the farmers and residents of the country or countries in which strangers

hunt. It behoves every man who hunts regularly to identify himself as much as lies in his power with the country in which he elects to take his sport. He should be seen in it at other times as well as in the hunting season, and he should co-operate as much as possible in furthering some of the interests of that country in which hunting has no special part. His purse should certainly be open, but his personal co-operation would be even more appreciated than his subscription. No doubt some trouble would be involved, but the result would be worth the trouble; and were the men from a distance to realise this fact they would materially lighten the load of Masters of Hounds, and we should probably hear of fewer resignations from them.

In another matter there is a great change, and one which is, I think, for the better. Formerly a noisier method of hunting prevailed than obtains nowadays. There was more holloaing and horn-blowing, and hounds were consequently much wilder than they are now. That they killed foxes and showed good sport is true, but they had not such large fields to contend with, and were certainly not so well disciplined, as a rule, as they now are. With regard to horn-blowing when a fox goes away, our modern huntsmen may be considered as somewhat chary of it, and make rather too little noise, especially in big woodlands. There is no doubt but that this is in a manner caused by their jealousy of the "thrusters," who always will be on hounds' backs when they have a chance; but it is an error of judgment for all that, for the innocent are punished with the guilty, and nothing vexes a man who has done his best to assist the

huntsman more than being left. When a fox has really gone it is the duty of a huntsman, according to the late Lord Berkeley's dictum on a historic occasion, "to blow his horn and shout 'gone away' or 'gone to ——' or something." Then, and then only, is he to be excused for making a noise, and then he ought to make one.

Another new departure, and one which seems to me a very objectionable one, is the pace at which hounds are taken from one covert to another. This is a growing evil. Instead of the regulation "hound trot," the pace is a round trot of seven or even more miles an hour, and when there is grass handy a strong canter is sometimes indulged in. At other times a big line across a country is selected. This is all wrong. To go at such a pace from covert to covert severely handicaps the man who has only one horse, for he always finds this tell on his horse before the end of the day, and he not infrequently has to miss the end of a good thing because his horse has been unduly bustled in going from covert to covert. Similarly, taking a big line over a country is to be avoided when drawing. There are plenty of men, good sportsmen, too, who do not aspire to ride over a country, but who like to see a bit of fun from the lanes and bridle roads. There is no reason why they should not have their fun, and they are frequently good supporters of the hunt. Therefore, Masters of Hounds, in the interests of the sections of their hunt to which I have drawn attention, would do well to consider the question of pace and route when going from covert to covert.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GOOD RUN

THERE is nothing more amusing than to notice men's opinions respecting the sport they are having, and sometimes when one has listened to their descriptions of the runs they have seen, one is tempted to ask the question whether there ever was a really good run. Of course, runs differ in degree, but I think it falls to the lot of few men to see many brilliant runs in their lifetime, even should they be men who hunt a great deal. For be it understood that to be out when a good run takes place and to miss it, as will happen on occasion to the best of men, is even more aggravating than not to have been out at all.

Good runs are of two kinds. There is the good run of fiction, and there is the more prosaic good run which goes to the making of hunting history. It must not be thought that I would include in the good runs of fiction those spirit-stirring passages in Whyte-Melville's or in Surtees' books which afford so much pleasure to hunting readers. The run in *Digby Grand*, Walter Brooke's fall at the eighteen-foot drain, that stern ride over Exmoor after the wild red deer, all these stand out in bold relief as choice bits to which the sportsman recurs with pleasure, and alongside them

may be placed the famous Cat and Custard Pot day, and Michael Hardy's first day with the Gin and Water Hounds, inimitable bits of description. But by the good runs of fiction, I mean those which appear in the pages of the gushing novelist, who, by the way, is generally a woman. What incredible distances hounds are made to run, and in what a remarkably short space of time; what horrible obstacles are cleared at a bound (that genial Irishman Charles Lever treats us to impossible places enough, but he is mild in comparison with some I could name); rivers are jumped like a four-foot drain. I often wonder how the youth who has feasted on such literature feels when he sees hounds for the first time and discovers what a stern, uncompromising look there is about four feet of stiff timber, and how neatly it can roll a good horse over if he should take off a moment too soon.

The good runs of which I would speak, however, are much more prosaic affairs than those which adorn the pages of Ouida and other writers of that class. And here I would point out how difficult it is to define a good run. Every one knows or should know a good run when he has the luck to see one, but a definition of one is quite another matter. To begin with, it is essential that there should be a point, yet I have seen many a very good run in which it could scarcely be said that a good point was made. The ideal run—forty minutes on the grass without a check—presupposes a six or seven mile point, and one of the best runs it was ever my lot to see was a seven-mile point in forty minutes over a very stiff bit of country in which grass was rather too scarce.

Most of the great runs I have seen—and I have seen about eight or ten in my time—have lasted more than an hour ; some have lasted for two, and one run, or rather succession of runs, was timed at three hours and a quarter. The latter had not a big point—as a matter of fact, hounds ran the same ring twice, but it was a very wide ring, a lot of country was crossed, and only eight of us saw the finish, and of the eight horses up at the finish one died from the results of the run, whilst another horse or two were killed in the field. Then there is the question of pace. For a run to be entitled to be called a great one, or even a good one, there must be a good pace most of the way. Hounds must *drive* and not hunt, though a few minutes' slower hunting should not necessarily relegate a run to the ranks of the moderate. It is strange, nay, 'tis passing strange, 'tis wonderful, what very elastic ideas some men have respecting pace. I was once out in a good country, hounds ran an eight-mile point in an hour, rising some 800 feet in the time, and on talking the run over with a man, he remarked that it was a pretty gallop, but *slow*. As for a considerable distance the leading horsemen were never in the same field with hounds, and as my critical friend was generally a field behind the leading horseman, I pointed out to him that there had been an opportunity to distinguish himself of which he had not taken advantage, and I asked him why he had not ridden on.

A run somehow or other gets coloured by the place from which a man has seen it. If he has got thrown out, or has missed it by some mischance, he is apt to look at it with prejudiced eyes, and to say that "it was not such a very good run after

all." But when a man has occupied a good place in a run, when his horse has carried him well, and he has been well forward all the way, he naturally looks upon that run with a favourable eye, and the distance is apt to expand and the time contract with the telling.

But the fact is that many men who go hunting expect too much. Knowing nothing and caring nothing about hounds and their work, these men miss the niceties of a hunting run, and are consequently apt to be censorious of anything which takes place at less than top pace.

Brilliant runs, as I have pointed out, are the exception. They take place only now and again, and it would be absurd to expect them to take place with much greater frequency than they do. But, given a fox "who leaves the parish"; given sufficient scent to keep going, even if the pace is slow; given also a varied country, and one in which it is possible to see hounds work, and here are all the elements which go to make sport. It is, I know, unfashionable to speak of anything that does not approach a steeplechase in pace as a good run, but given the conditions above named, and there is, in my opinion, many a good run and enjoyable run which the thoughtless dub as a rotten one, and deplore their luck for falling in with.

CHAPTER XXV

HUNTING ACCIDENTS

No game was ever yet worth a rap,
For a rational man to play,
Into which no accident or mishap
Could possibly find its way.

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

WHEN the history of a season comes to be written, and its excellences and its shortcomings reckoned up, amongst other things that will come in for notice are accidents. For from all parts of the country, north, south, east, and west, in the shires and in the provinces, comes the same tale. There are accidents which have terminated fatally, and more which have entailed considerable suffering on those to whom they happened, combined with being crippled for a longer or shorter period. Some of these accidents have been occasioned by wire, but not so many as one would think when one comes to consider the many miles of wire fencing which exist throughout the length and breadth of the land. But to their credit, be it said, the great majority of farmers are willing to have their wire taken down. For some reason with which wire has nothing to do, hunting accidents are becoming more numerous, and it behoves hunting men to look into the matter and endeavour to find the

cause of the growing evil. When in one hunt, and that not a particularly large one, the number of sportsmen laid up during the season from fractures, concussions, and other injuries amounts to about eight per cent of the average number found at the meet, it is time indeed to look round and ask questions.

Of course, it is an understood thing that he who plays bowls must expect rubs, and it is impossible for a man who rides over a country to secure an immunity from falls. These he will get whether he rides over a difficult or an easy country, and more frequently, perhaps, in the latter than in the former ; at least, that has been my experience. Occasionally also a man will get nastily hurt, and at times the whole hunting world will be shocked by a fatal accident. But these serious accidents are becoming more numerous, and the increase in the size of the fields is not sufficient to cause the increase in nasty accidents. It has been said that hounds run faster than they did, and that on that account accidents more frequently happen ; but the accidents do not happen as a rule when hounds are running their hardest, a hunting run of an hour and a half at a holding pace being generally more productive of serious disaster than a brilliant forty minutes. Blind drains contribute their quota to the dismal roll, and there is no doubt that in some countries ditches are not so scoured out as was the case when agriculture was prosperous, and every farmer vied with his neighbour in the neatness of his holding.

I think that one fruitful source of misadventure is the lack of judgment displayed on the part of many of the field. They have entered upon

hunting without any knowledge of practical horsemanship; they have doubtless plenty of pluck to get them into difficulties, but they lack the fine hands and coolness by which many a man gets out of difficulties scathless. A fine horseman may, and frequently does, get a nasty fall, even when riding a made horse, but he is not so frequently hurt as is the man to whom I have just alluded.

But there is a danger in the hunting field which could easily be removed, a danger, too, which is fast increasing, and which is of so serious a nature that it is really a wonder that there is not more disaster than there is. Look at any field when hounds go away from a covert. You will see men go in a harum-scarum fashion, their horses all abroad and themselves more so, intent on only one object, viz. to pass some one who is in front of them. What care they for the men whose horses they knock out of their stride and into the fence? What care they over whom they ride or on to whom they jump? Their selfish object must be attained, and when their turn comes, as come it generally does in the end, they are the loudest in their complaints. Here is an account of some preventable accidents. In one instance a gentleman's horse fell on the far side of a drain; a reckless man riding in his wake knocked him down as he was rising, his horse catching him on the head; the result was the unfortunate man was carried from the field unconscious, that concussion of the brain took place, and he has not yet fully recovered. The other case was even worse. A gentleman fell over a fence. It was in a country where there was plenty of room, and there was not the slightest

occasion to be riding in his line even. Yet one of the reckless ones galloped madly on, jumped the fence, his horse landing with both forefeet on the unfortunate man who was down. The result was that he got a broken collar-bone and several ribs knocked off, and was in an altogether helpless condition. You would naturally think the guilty one would have pulled up and done what he could for the man he had injured. But no : he must keep his place at any cost, and he galloped on and left him. Fortunately his plight was noticed, and he was attended to by some good Samaritans, but so far as the man who did the mischief was concerned he might have lain there till now. If I had been the Master of that particular pack of hounds I should have felt inclined, on his next making his appearance at one of my fixtures, to request him to withdraw or I would take hounds home. Such a man is a danger to every one in the hunting field, and his room is certainly preferable to his company. The other accident to which I allude is that which happened to a well-known Master of Hounds, who was so severely kicked on his making his first appearance after a prolonged absence due to an accident, that he had to leave the field. This kind of accident is preventable, and on the subject of kickers every practical man will endorse the opinion of Captain M. Horace Hayes, who says, "The presence of the orthodox danger signal in the form of a red bow on the animal's tail is no excuse for bringing into a large field of horses a brute which will resent being touched behind." Finally, if men would be more considerate of others, if they would take their own line and avoid "cutting in" and jumping on their friends, there would be a

diminution of hunting accidents. Accidents there would be of course : that is inevitable, but the accident which can be prevented would disappear, and this, after all, is the worst to bear under any circumstances.

Any one who has had a thirty-years' experience of hunting will, I think, readily admit that there are now more good horsemen riding to hounds than there were a quarter of a century ago. Where then you saw a dozen men going well over a country, now you see from a score to thirty. But unfortunately there are now also more *bad* horsemen hunting, and to their conduct in the field many accidents could doubtless be traced were the trouble taken to do it. In individual cases no one, however, likes to attempt such a thing, though I often wonder, when I see a bad fall, how some of those who are present can feel themselves quite guiltless in the matter.

Here is a source of danger. There are many men who, with little knowledge of the sport, and possessed of the merest rudimentary knowledge of the art of riding, yet are by no means void of ambition and emulation, and though they have the sense to know that they cannot aspire to ride alongside the flyers of the hunt, they think they are quite good enough to beat each other. Jones tries to cut down Robinson, and Smith tries to cut down Jones, and amongst them all Johnson comes to grief. If you want to see how foolishly and recklessly some of these people ride you have only to go out in a dogcart when hounds are at a favourite fixture. Mind, they are all good fellows, they merely err from ignorance, but they err nevertheless.

And the sum of their offence is that in the great majority of cases their horses are nearly, if not quite, out of control as long as a gallop is left in them. They see the first-flight men gallop faster than they are doing, and consequently they flatter themselves that they are riding at a safe pace. What they do not see is that the first-flight men can stop their horses at any moment. And to this absence of control over their horses many of the misadventures caused by crossing at fences is due.

I should be inclined to express the opinion that there are fewer fatal and dangerous accidents in proportion in steeplechasing than there are in hunting, and the reasons for this, I take it, are that no man gets up to ride a steeplechase without having some pretensions to horsemanship ; that in a steeplechase each man takes his own line, and it is only in the case of a horse swerving that any "crossing" takes place ; and that the fences all have to be jumped. It is a frequent matter of comment that there are more nasty falls in an easy country than in a stiff one, and the reason probably is that no man attempts to ride over a stiff country unless he is mounted on a horse that has some pretensions to being a hunter.

"It sometimes happens that when a horse has been doing stiff fences he fails altogether over a much easier country." So says Sir Claude de Crespigny, and than him no one has a better right to give an opinion. Similarly many a clever hunter, who can and does clear high timber, thick bullfinch, or wide drain without a mistake comes down at a little place which a boy could jump on a pony. The horse is careless, the man equally so,

and the result is a bad fall. In this respect I can speak from personal experience.

I wonder how many of my readers remember poor Morris of the 7th Hussars, and his sad and untimely fate. That he was killed out hunting is certain ; how the accident happened will never be known. He was found dead, his neck broken, with his collar and shirt unbuttoned, and his breast-pin stuck in his coat. Everything points to a collision, but one thing is certain, that the poor fellow was left by some one who should have remained with him till assistance came.

That we shall always have hunting accidents so long as men ride to hounds is certain, but it is possible that they may be fewer than they have been of late years. That they ought to be fewer most men of experience believe. Let us, then, try to reduce them to a minimum, which is only to be done by keeping full control of our horses, riding our own line, and keeping ourselves in that good condition which enables us to make an extra exertion when extra exertion is needed.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW NOT TO DO IT

NOT the least of the difficulties with which fox-hunting has to contend in these latter days is the eagerness with which some men rush into print in order to make suggestions about a sport of which they have little or no practical knowledge. I have already pointed out that the keenest critics of Masters and huntsmen are those whose ignorance is generally pronounced, and so, *pari passu*, is it the case with the man who poses as the reformer of hunting practice, and who seeks to set up a code of hard-and-fast rules to govern a sport of the inner life of which he knows little or nothing. And it may be remarked that a man may have hunted regularly, he may indeed have hunted for many years, yet be in the most absolute ignorance of a great deal which appertains to what is, after all, the king of field sports. And the very fact that there is underlying the would-be reformer's unpractical schemes a certain substratum of abstract right renders his interference all the more harmful.

It may be laid down as an axiom that every man who hunts regularly should subscribe to one or more packs of hounds, according to circumstances ; and it is well known that there are many men who contrive to evade subscribing to any

hunt, or who, when they do subscribe, get off with paying as little as they can, and these are the gentlemen who render a hunt secretary's life a burden to him at times.

Here comes our reformer, who has recently been giving us the benefit of his opinion. "Every man must subscribe who hunts," says he, "and if he does not subscribe resort must be had to cap money." With this suggestion there is not much fault to find, and the resort to cap money would only be a return to an old custom. At the same time, even the resort to "cap money" has its difficulties. For example, it would seem hard for a man who goes out on one horse for an hour or two, and who is obliged to leave, say at 2 P.M., to give 20s. or 10s. to see every covert drawn blank until he left, and then to find that the run of the season had taken place in his absence. This is an extreme case, certainly, and the man who is situated as I describe is generally the member of some hunt or hunts, and as such would be exempt from "capping." "Capping," I may say, however, seems to be the only way of getting at those gentlemen who reside on the borders of two or three hunts, and carefully avoid subscribing to any of them, but it will require doing with tact.

With respect to what the subscriptions should be our reformer lays down the law in no half-and-half style. A man must pay according to the number of horses he keeps is his dictum, and then he goes on to say that though this seems hard on the heavy weight, yet it is only just, as the heavy man with his second and third horses does more harm than the light man. Now this is just what

the heavy man does not do. How is it that in the big runs—the runs that make history—the heavy weights—by which I of course do not mean the sixteen and seventeen stone division, but the thirteen and fourteen stone men—almost invariably beat the light weights? It is not that they can crush through a bullfinch which would hold the nine-stone man, for these occur but seldom in a run, and are besides only found in some countries. It is because the heavy man generally rides with more discretion, does no unnecessary galloping about, and does not take the liberties with a horse that his lighter friend seldom fails to do. It is the light man generally who rides over the softest ground, regardless of consequences, and it is on the softest ground that the damage is done. As for the second horsemen, Lord Lonsdale and other Masters of Hounds have taught us how to deal with them. Roughly, the plan of subscribing so much per horse, or so much per day per week, has a good deal to commend it, and it is practically acted upon by a great proportion of the rank and file of hunting men in assessing their subscriptions; but as a hard-and-fast rule it would never do. To begin with, the man who felt himself bound under such a stringent rule would undoubtedly feel inclined to insist upon certain rights in return, and a good deal of the pleasantness which at present exists between the Master and Secretary and the members of a hunt would, at any rate, be endangered, whilst it is by no means certain that the funds would benefit to any considerable extent. For example, a man might be asked point blank for a £50 subscription, who under the present state of things would have gladly given £100.

And it may be said that, on the whole, public opinion exercises a very salutary effect on the question of subscriptions.

Then our recent reformer tells us how, in his opinion, much of this money should be spent. He says in the first place the farmer should be subsidised, *i.e.* he should be paid a certain sum of money to allow hounds to cross his land, and that on his part he should take down all wire, etc. "Then," says he, "the hunting man would have a right to cross the land, instead of being as now only a guest, and sometimes an unwelcome one." I don't think I ever came across a more impracticable suggestion. The whole question absolutely bristles with impossibilities. In the first place, supposing sufficient money were raised to subsidise the farmers in a hunt, which is not by any means a certainty, how is it to be distributed? Is the man whose land is crossed twice in a season to have the same amount per acre as the man on whose farm is situate a favourite covert, which is drawn some once a fortnight, or oftener, from November to March? Is the man over whose farm hounds never run to be left out altogether? If so, he will be dissatisfied, and if he is not left out some of his neighbours will be discontented. Is the farmer who hunts to be treated in the same way as the farmer who does not? In either case there would be grievous heartburnings.

But supposing these matters were settled, how would the field "who had a right" be likely to behave. They would naturally be more careless about leaving gates open, they would not be so amenable to the Master's orders about damaging crops, they would in a majority of cases consult

their own convenience, and their own convenience only, and in reply to remonstrances would return the unanswerable argument, "*I have paid for it.*" Then suppose by any mischance a bit of wire should have been placed in a gap by a farmer, or by one of his men without his knowledge, and that particular bit of wire, having been forgotten, were to cause an accident, under this scheme the farmer would be actionable, and though very few would bring an action under the circumstances, it cannot be said that no one would. Then again, it may be urged, if you pay the farmer for riding over his land, he should not only take down the wire, but should have no unnegotiable fences on his land. And then you are brought face to face with the question as to what is a negotiable fence, a question which never has been, and never will be, satisfactorily solved.

There can be no doubt about one thing. When a farmer really sustains damages, he must be reasonably and fairly treated, and this in the majority of cases he is. Hunting depends on the mutual forbearance and courtesy and tact of the owners and occupiers of land and of hunting men, and any change in the fundamental principles which underlie it would tend to harm and not good. A hard-and-fast contract between the parties concerned would only tend to promote ill feeling and probably litigation, and our recent reformer has admirably succeeded in showing us

HOW NOT TO DO IT,

CHAPTER XXVII

CAPPING

“WAYS and means” are a very important item in every hunt, and how to provide the sinews of war is a matter which exercises that sorely-tried individual, the hunt secretary, no little. For it is palpable that increasing fields and the requirements of modern sport mean increased expenditure, and it is unfortunately true that funds are not forthcoming in proportion to the number of men who hunt. In fashionable countries and in provincial countries alike; in countries where the expenditure is counted by thousands, and in countries where a very few hundreds serve to keep things afloat, there is heard the same complaint, that too many of the men who hunt want their hunting for nothing. Resignations, too, take place from time to time, because Masters of Hounds are called upon to pay too large a proportion of the expenses; and not unfrequently, when a “whip up” is made to meet the requirements of the Master, there is great difficulty in collecting the extra money promised. Why this should be it is difficult to say, but men who will spend their money lavishly over a moderate shooting appear to think that they should enjoy the best of good hunting for a very moderate outlay. Of course such a state of things

is wrong *ab initio*, but it is very difficult to say how to put it right. A suggestion has been made that a man should subscribe in proportion to the number of days per week that he hunts, and there certainly is something to be said in favour of such a proposal. But there is one thing which must be borne in mind, and that is that as soon as fox-hunting becomes as it were a close borough, as soon as only subscribers are allowed to hunt, and an attempt is made to dictate to a man what the amount of his subscription must be—in other words, as soon as fox-hunting is confined to club members, so soon will fox-hunting be on the downward line. For fox-hunting exists on the mutual forbearance not of one or two, but of several classes, and it is not difficult to show how what for want of a better word I will call the “club” system would entail a hardship on many a man who enjoys an occasional day with hounds on a friend’s horse, and who works very hard to get it. It may be said off-hand by some who only look at one side of the question, “Well, such a man is as well away. What can he ever do for the sport?” But besides being a selfish way of putting the matter, it is begging the question with a vengeance. For though this man’s circumstances may not admit of his paying a liberal subscription and keeping a large stud of hunters at the present time, it is quite possible that in the future he may be able to do so. In the future, too, he may own coverts, and then he will be an important personage enough in the eyes of all hunting men. And even if he does not, if he never rises even to the position of a one-horse man, he has a kindly feeling for the sport, a kindly feeling which tends to promote a

strong public feeling in favour of fox-hunting, and is that no small matter, my masters? You have only to talk to a man who has seen a day or two's good hunting in the days of his youth to find how the hunting spirit lives and burns undyingly in him who has ever mixed in the sport thoroughly, be it in ever so small a manner. A couple of instances occur to me. One is of a draper whom I met some years ago. Strong was that man's opinion in favour of fox-hunting. Equally strongly did he protest against the folly of the Humanitarian League in condemning the Royal Buckhounds, and in the course of conversation it oozed out that in the long ago he had enjoyed his day or two to hounds, and he told with sparkling eyes of how he had read in one of the sporting papers of a run which was nearly identical with one he had ridden in many years before with no small credit to himself. I asked him why he did not hunt now, and he told me that he had never had a chance to keep up his riding, and that now his nerve was gone. But, he added, "I read every word of the *Field*, and *Land and Water*, and the *County Gentleman*, every word, that is, which relates to hunting." The man is a wealthy man, and should he ever purchase an estate there will be foxes in his coverts and cherry brandy on his sideboard for fox-hunters. The other gentleman, with whom I had a charming conversation, was an actor, a man who had seen men and cities, a man of wide experiences. Somehow we got to talk of our boyish days and our boyish escapades, and he told me of the sport he had enjoyed in the long ago when Sir John Cope hunted the country over which Mr. Garth presides. He had had a few days, and gone well on

occasions, so well that once Sir John gave him the brush. Need I say that that brush is a happier memory to him than the rounds of well-merited applause which greeted his most finished performances. Since his early youth he has had no opportunity of hunting, but his heart is in it. Now need it be asked that such men as these form a healthy public opinion respecting the sport of sports, and help to keep the *fin-de-siècle* Chadbands and Stigginses in their places.

But it may be asked, How are the sinews of war to be provided? How are men to be induced to pay their proper quota to the hunt funds? I am very much afraid that there are some men who will never be induced to do what they ought to do in this direction. From the first they are hopeless. But with fields increasing and expenses increasing something must be done, and there seems to be a general disposition to revive the old system of "capping." Against this, if it be done tactfully, I have no objection whatever. It has been suggested that a guinea should be asked for from every man who is not a member of an established hunt, save, of course, the farmers; but I am inclined to think this is too heavy. A guinea is a lot to give for a blank day. With a pack of staghounds near a town it may be found to answer to adopt such a plan, but a heavy "cap" with foxhounds is to be deprecated. Then it has been mooted that all men not members of the hunt should be asked for a guinea. But a guinea, or even half a guinea, is, I take it, too much to exact from strangers, many of whom, perhaps, do more for hunting in proportion to their means than some members of the hunt they are visiting. Let me put a case. A man

owns a little land in one hunt, and a little land in another. On both these small estates there is a fox covert well looked after ; his tenants send in no poultry bills ; they have no wire on their farms, and they do everything to second him in his efforts to provide sport for his friends. Circumstances compel him to hunt with other hounds than those in whose countries his coverts are situate, and he subscribes to the pack he hunts with. Should he be on a visit to a friend in some fourth country, it would, in my opinion, be not only inhospitable, but grossly unfair to ask him for a heavy "cap," nor would it tend to the benefit of fox-hunting.

Yet I am an advocate for "capping" if judiciously gone about. But the amount asked for should be small, and I would ask every one for it except the farmers, whether they were members of the hunt or not. This plan is adopted in Ireland, where 2s. 6d. is demanded from each man who goes out, and is cheerfully paid. Farmers, of course, are exempt, but no one else, whatever may be his station. A considerable sum of money is thus realised ; a four-days-a-week country would, allowing for a month's frost, make £1000, with an average of 100 out per day, which is not a very large one in these days.

And then there is another phase of the question. If you ask a man who goes out on horseback for 2s. 6d., should you let those who go out in carriages, on bicycles, or on foot, go scot free? I am inclined to think they should all be "asked for a bit," for they enjoy the sport, or they would not come out, and they do some harm in their generation. There are liberal supporters of hunting who go

out in carriages, and even on bicycles, and on foot on occasion, and I am one of those who like to see carriages and foot people out ; but if you come at one class of sportsmen, why not at another ?

CHAPTER XXVIII

HUNTING ON FOOT

“FOX-HUNTING on foot is but labour in vain,” says Egerton Warburton in that spirit-stirring song, “Oulton Lowe,” and who is there that has laboured in breeches and boots over a deep fallow, the boots just a trifle small, *i.e.* tight, that will be found to deny the fact? Yet there is a good deal of sport of a very enjoyable kind seen on foot, and when a man is young and active and his wind is good he can get a lot of enjoyment out of a day on shanks’ mare, and see more sport than the man who has never seen the sport of kings save from the back of a 200-guinea hunter wots of. Then there are hunting countries, though perhaps your sportsman who hunts in the so-called fashionable centres may scarcely think them worthy of the name, where hunting on foot is the only way in which the wily fox can be pursued. The Blencathra, the Eskdale (Cumberland), the Coniston, the Ullswater, and the Mellbrake are amongst the packs which show the best of sport with the “girt greyhound foxes” of the Cumberland and Westmoreland fells. “And who can tell how hard it is to climb” those steep hillsides at any pace, let alone at the swinging trot affected by the hardy

dalesmen. In these countries it must be said that a good cry is indispensable, and probably in the lowlands their hounds would be called noisy. They certainly are "rum 'uns to look at"; equally certain is it that they are "good 'uns to go," and their drive is remarkable, whilst they account for their foxes in a workmanlike manner. I have never had a day's hunting with any of these packs. I must say that hill-climbing is not much in my line, and that I prefer the four legs of a stout hunter, 15.3, and a blood one, to my own two to carry me to hounds. But I have seen a hound trail and a fell race in the dales, and a more sporting way of spending an hour or two I do not know of. In the hound trail some eight or ten hounds started, and the trail would be at least five miles, but it looked more like six. The start was in a valley, then it took to the right, running up one fell side for some distance, crossing the valley again and returning to the field whence it had started on the opposite side of the valley. By this arrangement it was possible, by means of a good field glass, to see everything hounds were doing, and their cheery cry could always be heard, for it is astonishing how the hills echo it back. The pace they ran at was a very fast one, perhaps faster than it would have been had they been running fox, and I should not omit to mention that I was informed that the hounds which were used for the hound trails were never taken out hunting, as they were unreliable. But the fell race gave one the best notion of hunting on foot as conducted in the dales, that is to say, it gave one some idea of the speed and endurance of those best of good sportsmen, the Cumberland "Statesmen." Some dozen athletic-

looking young fellows set out on the journey, which was some three miles, and, with the exception of the run in, was all either up hill or down. At a long stretching trot, a pace which covers ground in a remarkably short time, they started up hill, rounded a flag some mile and a half off, and then ran down the hill, jumping from crag to crag in a way simply marvellous to one from a low country. They came in in rather straggling order, but they did not seem to be distressed, not even the gentleman who "walked in with the crowd." He had been out-paced, that was all, and in a short time I make no doubt they would have all been ready for another run. Yet mark the folly of our modern busybodies. Said one of the competitors to me, "They want to stop our fell races; they say it is cruel to us and injurious. Injurious," he added, slapping his chest with his brawny arms, "look at me after the race," and I may add that he was not the winner, and that he had not, in racing parlance, turned a hair.

It goes without saying that those who hunt on foot on Cumbrian and Westmoreland fells must often do a good deal by ear. In the first place there is a great deal of covert; then hounds must, through covering a great deal more ground than their followers, travel very much faster. But the dalesman's skill in woodcraft, his quick ear and keen eye, when it has a chance of being called into request, and his intuitive knowledge of the probable run of a fox, always serve him in good stead, and he generally succeeds in getting to the end of the run. And even then his labours are far from being ended. In such a country earth-stopping is difficult, and in many places it is

impossible to carry it out effectually. So that after a long and tiring run, those who first arrive on the scene frequently find hounds baying at a hole in the rocks. There is no thought of leaving him, he must be got if possible. Terriers are sent in, and the work of excavation, frequently a long and weary one, begins. On one occasion I was informed by their huntsman, "Owd Tommy Dobson," it was seventeen hours and a half from the time they found in the morning to the time they got to their fox and killed him.

For there is no compunction about killing a fox with these gallant sportsmen. The hill foxes play havoc with the lambs in a stormy spring, and it reflects the greatest credit on the hill farmers that they only kill the fox in the legitimate way, an example which might well be followed in some of the more fashionable districts where farmers and others do derive some benefit from hunting visitors.

I may add that until a few years ago the Courts Leet used to pay the huntsman 10s. for each brush he produced at its sitting, a survival doubtless of the "wolf-geld," but this has been abolished, and Tommy Dobson says "he doesn't see what good them coorts are noo."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RUNNER

No hunt would be complete without a "runner," and no hunt is ever long without one, though I do not remember coming across any hunt that had two. One may be tolerated, but two would be unbearable, for though the runner is a good sportsman, and very useful upon occasion, he is not always a desirable companion, though there are, of course, exceptions. On an opening day, which is one of his harvests, he is a great man indeed. Dressed in a cast-off scarlet, which is generally far from being shabby, with a two-season-old hunting cap on his head, white breeches, and leather leggings, the gift all of them of various members of the hunt or their servants, he on that occasion presents a truly imposing spectacle. He will be at the meet before the first horseman arrives, though he may have had to tramp a dozen miles or more to get there. If the fixture is at some country house it is certain that he will have made friends with the butler by telling him of some piece of country gossip, and he will have had his reward in the shape of a good lump of beef and bread and a pint of beer. Should, however, the fixture be at some village, he is sure to find congenial company in some taproom, where he will entertain all and sundry with incidents of interest connected with

the entry and the cub-hunting, on both of which he is by no means a bad authority. But to his credit be it said that on these occasions he never breathes a word about the whereabouts of foxes. On this point he is oracular, and on no account will he be drawn to tell what he knows. For that he does know is certain; and there is little in connection with the hunt and its management on which he does not possess information or form a pretty shrewd opinion of his own. But however he may have obtained his information he is particularly discreet as to whom he imparts it, and when hunt secrets become public property it is rarely indeed that the dissemination of them can be traced to the runner. The moment the field begins to arrive social enjoyment is put to one side. Assuming the cap of office, the runner takes up his position on village green or in park, and commences the serious business of the day. For every one he has a friendly greeting, from the duke to the farmer and tradesman he misses none, though he has a very shrewd idea of the due order of precedence, his pocket being a guide which never fails him. Who so ready as he to tighten a girth, take up or let out a link in a curb chain, or perform some of those odd offices in which a man on foot can be of use to a man on horseback? He will hold horses or look for hunters when men arrive on their steaming hacks, and his politeness to his clients is proverbial. With the Master he has some minutes' confidential talk, as in duty bound, and the huntsman also comes in for his serious attention, but if he be an old hand the whippers-in are passed by with a cheery nod and pleasant good-morning.

On the opening day he does not beg ; indeed, he would scorn the imputation at any time, though he is not above giving a friendly hint on occasions when funds wax low. But his pockets get fairly well filled, and many a shilling and sixpence go into them from his wealthier patrons to mix with the coppers of his poorer friends ; for the runner is a privileged character, and every one contributes a little to his maintenance.

That he is a ne'er-do-well is admitted on all hands, and though he appears in glorious apparel at the opening meet, it is a wonder to every one how he has lived through the summer months. His old haunts—his winter haunts, that is—have not known him, and it seems only with hunting men that he can make any headway ; whilst work he cannot, or will not, which comes to much the same thing in the end. Indeed, most of his patrons have not seen him since the last day of the season, which with him is also a day of ingathering.

Ne'er-do-well as he is, he is a sportsman, and you may be sure that if there is any fun he will see something of it. Indeed, some runners get over the ground so well, and their knowledge of the country is so good, that they can see a great deal of the sport in all but flying countries, and not infrequently they manage to see the afternoon's draw.

Then, as night approaches, he sets off on his homeward tramp, for your runner carefully eschews trains. The glowing lights of some roadside public-house throw out a tempting invitation. He is soon in the taproom, a chunk of bread and cheese and a pint of ale before him. This despatched, he begins to regale the company with

choice anecdote, for he is a born entertainer, this runner of ours. Then another pint of ale is set before him, and then another—he does not pay for them, mind—until at last his speech begins to come thick, and he turns into an outhouse to pass the night as best he may.

Yes, I am afraid our runner is a thorough scamp, but he has redeeming qualities. He speaks the truth ; he is discreet in many things, telling no man's secrets—no secrets of the hunt at any rate ; he is scrupulously honest, and he is a sportsman. Let us then not cast a stone at him, but give him sixpence now and again, even if he be impudent when in his cups.

But there is a runner of another type, a type which is scarce, I admit, but which nevertheless does exist in many countries, and of which I have known one or two specimens myself. Our runner is of a higher social scale than the man whom I have already described. Not only is he not above earning his living, but, as a rule, he is an industrious and capable man. He generally belongs to the small farmer or village tradesman class ; he boasts, when his tongue is loosened, for he is not given to be communicative as a rule, that his "fore elders" had been connected with the ——— Hunt for generations, and he looks upon himself as part and parcel of the hunt establishment. There is nothing of the scapegrace about him ; indeed, I have known one of the class a teetotaler ; but I should say that this is a rare occurrence. He never begs or even hints at such a thing as a present, save and except that he will ask for a cast-off scarlet coat, which is kept with scrupulous neatness. His breeches, generally of corduroy, are

well fitting, his boots and leggings clean, and his hat or velvet cap—he rather affects the latter if he can get one—is spotless. He has not yet got to the white-tie stage ; at least I have never known one of his cloth to sport a white tie. Neither is the gaudy-coloured, cheap silk abomination affected by him. His neck covering takes one back into the long ago, and his choice lies between a wisp of black silk put loosely twice round his neck and tied in a small bow or a woollen “comforter,” generally of the “shepherd’s plaid” pattern. Gloves he never affects ; indeed, it is questionable whether he ever had a pair on in his life, but I have, in very cold weather, seen his hands partly protected by muffatees coming well down. His stick, generally an oak or a hazel, is of his own cutting and trimming, and is as serviceable and hard-looking as he is himself.

I have said that he is a man who scorns to ask or hint at such a thing as a money present, but when a hunt is lucky enough to have such a “runner” as he is attached to it, there are countless ways in which benefits can be rendered to him without wounding his pride. Not infrequently I have known him deputed to look after certain drains and earths haunted on occasion by foxes when those earths and drains are out of the beat of the regular keeper, and he is occasionally sent on messages of importance, for which work, of course, he is well paid. There is one article in his creed, and that is that when hounds are out there it is his duty to be, and I have heard men of his class say that they scarcely have missed a day for seasons.

Now just imagine for one moment what this means for a poor man who is obliged to work hard

for his living, and who does it. Wealthy men too frequently grumble when asked for an extra £25 subscription to meet a pressing emergency, and say they pay plenty for their sport; but who pays so much for his sport as the "runner" of whom I am writing? The loss of a day's work means to him that he has to make up for it by working when others are resting, or that he or his family will probably want something that they ought to have. To his credit be it said that the latter is of very rare occurrence. And then this man does many little services for the hunt for which he is never paid. He will go a mile or two out of his way to open earths that might and probably would otherwise remain unopened till the next day, and in countless ways he is always proving of use.

It has always been a wonder to me how the man manages to get over the distances which he travels, and with apparently so little fatigue to himself. He frequently has from twelve to sixteen miles to walk to covert; he will be out all day, and he will tramp the same distance home at night. He is not the man to stop at a roadside public, regaling the ears of the taproom visitors with accounts of sport and tales of sportsmen. He will have his pint of beer, for which he will always offer to pay himself, drop a curt word or two as to whether sport has been good or bad, and trudge off homewards, for probably there is a pair of boots to be mended or finished, for your runner of this class is somehow very frequently a cordwainer.

When you can get him to talk, our friend is entertaining indeed. But he has a rooted aversion to being "interviewed," and when any one attempts

to "draw" him, he has the finest talent for holding his tongue of any man I ever met. His is a life of hardship ; he is exposed to all the vicissitudes of a changeable climate, and he pays a big price for the limited amount of sport which he is enabled to see. Yet he is, perhaps, to be envied after all. He is a thorough sportsman at heart, and no scarlet-clad hero, mounted on a 300-guinea hunter, enjoys his share of the sport with a keener zest than does our runner. He is, moreover, a hound man and a naturalist. He is thoroughly at home in the kennel, where, on account of the numberless good offices he does, he is a welcome guest. He knows the hounds, though, of course, he is not an expert with their pedigrees, and he can tell whether they are right during the early days of cub-hunting by their cry, which is more than many a bold sportsman can do. An observant man, he knows the habits of all game and wild animals in a remarkable degree, yet I have never known him to be a poacher. He is, however, invaluable as a beater at a "big shoot," and the keeper knows how well he can manage the rest of the beaters, and puts his trust in him accordingly. Yes, on the whole, his lines are cast in pleasant places, for he has the respect of his social superiors and equals. He is the terror of the wrongdoer in the hunting field, and he has gathered up a store of sporting lore which, to a man of his temperament, must be an everlasting fund of entertainment when no longer able to follow his favourite pack.

CHAPTER XXX

WITH A STRANGE PACK

ONE of the pleasantest features of fox-hunting is that there is so little jealousy about it. Jealous riding there may be, but that is a very different thing, and though too much of it is to be deprecated, a little of it gives that spice to the sport which is one of its great fascinations. But the hunting man is not jealous in the same way that the man whose sport is of a solitary nature too frequently is ; he does not look upon his neighbour with quite the same eyes, and he regards the stranger as one of the craft. Nor is the reason of this far to seek. Hunting, as conducted in this country, is emphatically a social sport ; times in a week the same men meet in pursuit of the same object, and so they welcome a stranger when he comes to visit them with a heartiness which is typical. That is, the bulk of them do, for I have known countries in which a stranger was looked upon with suspicion, and in which the Master and his followers seemed always on the point of saying, " Why comes this prophet amongst us ? " This, however, is the rare exception, and it must be admitted that there are some who pose as visitors to whom the cold shoulder should be shown. For there are men who go about from country to

country, never subscribing a farthing to hounds or to poultry fund, and who turn a deaf ear to all the legitimate demands made upon them. These gentlemen form one of the difficulties of modern hunting, and they are a thorn in the side of masters of hounds and secretaries. It is for their behoof that the system of capping is being revived in some countries, a system which is certainly an ungracious one, though it is not easy to see how otherwise to meet what is admitted on all hands to be a great and growing evil.

Such men as these are, however, not to be looked upon as visitors in the true sense of the word, and with them I have nothing to do here. Strongly as I advocate a man hunting from his own home, I think that every hunting man should, when opportunity offers, try to see other packs and other countries. By so doing he will enlarge his knowledge of the sport, he will get to know other methods, and he will make a vast number of new friends, with whom he will have at least one object in common. He will also store up for himself many pleasant memories; hounds and horses whose names will live in history may have become more or less familiar to him, and unless he is very unfortunate he will have met with, and seen, and talked to some of the most skilled exponents of the Noble Science.

I am inclined to think that to get a correct idea of a strange pack of hounds it is by no means necessary to go into their best country, or put oneself to all sorts of inconvenience to reach a favourite fixture. In the first place, at the favourite fixture there is sure to be a crowd, and I take it that it is the hounds that are the object

of the visit and not the crowd. Therefore it is as well to avoid what is known as the fashionable meets. For my own part, when visiting a strange pack I like to get into that part of the country where the individuality of hounds and huntsman has the best chance of showing itself. Over a fine grass country, with a flying scent, and a hard-riding field behind them there is less difference between the various packs than when in the country in which they most frequently hunt, and there is also less chance of seeing hounds work. I know men who will not go on to the wolds or the moors in the country which is peculiarly their own, and who, when their own pack is in what is to them an undesirable locality, take the opportunity of paying a visit to a neighbouring pack. These gentlemen lose more than they wot of. Certainly there is much pleasure to be gained from a good run over wold or moor, and hunting in each place has peculiarities which cannot fail to strike any observant eye. Indeed, I know of no prettier sight than hounds running hard over a moor, which they generally do in the spring. The proper time to visit the wolds, especially if there should be, as is frequently the case, a large proportion of plough on them, is before Christmas, indeed, as early in November as possible, for though the wolds often have a bad name as scenting ground, they generally carry a good scent after the October rains have come, and before they are ploughed. When the plough has done its work, as on all light ploughed land, scent is uncertain. But a day in the plough country is sure to be appreciated by the lover of hounds. If a large portion of the country of the pack to be visited

consists of big woodlands, by all means contrive to time your visit so that you may see hounds at work in the woods. It by no means implies that the woods will never be left all day. For hounds that are used to the work very frequently drive woodland foxes out into the open when there is a scent, and at times they are not long about doing it. So when hunting with a good pack of hounds in a woodland country it is necessary to keep a sharp look-out, and advisable to select a native of the country as a pilot.

The few days a man gets with strange packs make him all the keener to hunt with his own, and add to his season's enjoyment in no small degree. The visit also tends to rub the rust off, a little of which will accumulate at times, and to promote the amenities which should exist between brother sportsmen. That it does the latter thoroughly the following incident illustrates. I was hunting in a strange country when the Master, with whom I was acquainted, said, "If hounds should find here, don't go down the far side of the covert, as you will find yourself pounded," a courtesy which was highly appreciated, and which made us firm friends at once.

CHAPTER XXXI

WITH A FARMER'S PACK

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,

is a maxim which applies to fox-hunting as to most other things in this world. We may look back with enthusiastic admiration to the days of old ; we may regret that old customs and old methods are now no longer practicable ; but we must recognise that the altered state of society renders it impossible for our sports to be carried on as they were fifty or even thirty years ago. A story is told of a farmer who attributed all the misfortunes which befell in his neighbourhood to "them dratted railways," and it is to the material progress which has been made during the last fifty years, of which the railway and telegraph form perhaps the most striking examples, that the difference in our hunting customs is chiefly due, and it is to that that the gradual decrease in the numbers of farmers' hunts must be attributed.

Fox-hunting in its modern development is a much more expensive sport than was formerly the case. To begin with, fields have more than quadrupled in size, and even in remote and so-called unfashionable countries they are numbered by

hundreds. Not long ago I met a pack of hounds at what was always looked upon as one of the worst fixtures. There was quite a strong muster, some fifty or sixty horsemen. I can remember the time when there would not have been more than a dozen. In another and more fashionable district, and with another pack of hounds, the field numbered nearly three hundred. Fifty years ago, and even more recently than fifty years ago, seventy or eighty would have been looked upon as a good field. These facts, combined with the improvement in agriculture, the enclosing of land, the cheapness of wire fencing, and the agricultural depression, necessitating a policy of economy in the management of farms, have tended to do away with the old farmers' hunts, which did so much for the sport in the early years of the century. It is necessary now that a Master of Hounds should have leisure, plenty of money, and an inclination to spend it liberally in the country over which he presides. Then there are poultry and damage funds, which require feeding, and which need the supervision of energetic secretaries, and altogether a great amount of ability and tact is now required to keep a country going which not so many years ago kept itself going. It is not that the sporting spirit is dying out in the places to which I am referring. That, I am happy to say, is as strong as ever it was. But circumstances have taken place which compel it to be exercised in a different way, and though we may lament the necessity for it, we must recognise the fact that gradually the hunt managed exclusively, or almost exclusively, by farmers is dying out in the land. The farmers, however, still continue to take an active interest in

the hunt and its management, but the old rough-and-ready establishment with hounds uneven, many of them not straight, but rare workers, establishments which showed a lot of sport, are now replaced by hounds that would make a creditable appearance at Peterborough, and the servants are turned out with a smartness that was at one time only associated with fashionable countries. Sport is, perhaps, not any better than in the brave days of old, but it is only under altered conditions that it is now possible.

They were cheery fellows, the members and managers of the old-fashioned farmers' hunts. Hospitable to a fault, keen enough to merit the approbation of a Jorrocks, good horsemen and bold, and with a fine knowledge of woodcraft, they hunted the out-of-the-way districts in which they lived with energy and skill. In one hunt I know for many years the subscription did not amount to more than £50, and when at last it was increased to £260, boundless wealth seemed the portion of the hunt. But a country could not be hunted five days a fortnight, or three days a week, on four times that amount nowadays. The amount I have mentioned, £260 per annum, was paid to the Master, who found everything save the keepers' fees, covert rents, and poultry damages. These were paid by the hunt, and it is needless to say that covert rents were only nominal, there being but one gorse covert for which any rent was paid. Poultry damages were also a very small item, and it was only in exceptional cases that any money was paid. All demands were carefully examined, and presents were made of various kinds, the result being that generally every one was satisfied. For,

for the amount of money which was expended, the recipients of the presents got good value ; some of the principal tradesmen in the district were good sportsmen, and gave the hunt the privilege of wholesale prices, so many a worthy lady found herself the owner of a black silk dress which cost the hunt some £2 or £3 less than she would have had to give for it. This system answered well when times were good, and when the hunt and the men who hunted were, with a few trifling exceptions, farmers, and the friends and relatives of those whose poultry had been tithed. Such a system could not prevail when fields began to increase in size, when men wanted another day a week, and when, as a consequence, the stock of foxes increased. Indeed, everything tended to the change which eventually became inevitable.

Yet they were cheery times, those of which I speak. During the summer most of the hounds, with the exception of the entry, were out at quarters, and they were generally gathered in about the first week in August. Early cub-hunting was unknown, and seldom did hounds take the field before the last week in September or the first in October. By that time they had got licked into shape, though occasionally there was a little wildness amongst the younger of them. The Master hunted the hounds himself, and though I have seen many a huntsman in my time, I don't think I ever saw a better man, especially in a woodland country. He kept two horses for his own riding, and one for his whipper-in, who was always a youngster who had to do the horses as well as look after the kennel, though he had a man to help him. This whipper-in was always a light

weight, and one horse had to do for him, though he occasionally had a mount given. He really did second whipper-in's work, the duties of the first whipper-in being undertaken in the field by a man who took a prominent part in the management of the affairs of the hunt, and who was himself no incapable huntsman when his services were required. Then there were always a lot of young farmers ready and willing to do anything they were asked, and an excellent average of sport was shown. It was a capital school for whippers-in, for the Master had plenty of time on his hands, and was always keen to impart instruction if his lad was of an inquiring mind. The result was that two of his whippers-in became huntsmen who made for themselves a name, whilst a third was a whipper-in of great merit, and one who only missed a good huntsman's place by an accident.

It stands to reason that the social element entered largely into such a hunt in the off season. There was, of course, the hunt dinner, a function which has fallen into desuetude, but which might be revived with advantage. Then at show and race meeting the well-to-do farmers in the neighbourhood entertained their hunting friends right royally, and as the hunting season approached these social gatherings became sort of informal committee meetings, at which matters connected with the welfare of the hunt were freely discussed. Then once a year the Master gave a ball to the young folk of his hunt, it being a *sine quâ non* that no married folk, save one or two privileged people, were to be guests. Merry little dances they were, and heartily were they appreciated. Yes, "the world went very well then," and though

I certainly recognise the fact that such conditions could not obtain in the country now, I cannot help feeling some regret for the customs of the days that are gone. But *Le Roi est mort; vive le Roi!* The horn of the hunter is still heard in the land, good sport prevails, and good fellowship, and, after all, what more can mortal wish for?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HUNTING PARSON

A STRONG prejudice undoubtedly exists in some circles against the parson who takes his amusement and relaxation from an arduous vocation by hunting a day or two in the week. Nor is this prejudice confined to a narrow puritanical school—copies of Luther in the pasteboard style—lean anti-everythings, as Oliver Wendell Holmes has so fitly called them. Men otherwise broad-minded and charitable enough, who will cheer the parson when he makes his century at cricket, who will ask him to lawn-tennis parties, who will join with him in a mild pool or a mild rubber at their own houses, will tell you gravely when they hear of a parson distinguishing himself in the hunting field, that “it is not clerical.” Why it is not clerical, I for the life of me cannot imagine. For my own part I see no difference between one sport or recreation and another. If it is not clerical to hunt, neither is it clerical to shoot or to play cricket, or to play lawn tennis or any other game, hunting only differing from these sports and pastimes inasmuch as it calls forth in more marked manner nerve, decision, and self-reliance. This being the case, I should say that it is the sport of all others which a parson should affect, especially if his lot be cast

amongst those to whom the horn of the huntsman and the cry of the pack is the sweetest of music. I remember a parson—I like the fine old word “parson,” and he had a strong dislike to the modern euphuisms of “clergyman” and “minister”—who, in returning thanks to the toast of “The Clergy,” said that there was no need for him to make excuses for being a sportsman, for sport was part, and a great part, of the national character, and in his opinion a parson was not well fitted for his duties unless he was himself a sportsman, and was thus able to thoroughly sympathise with those amongst whom his lot was cast. With that opinion I entirely agree.

But to return to the hunting parson. Perhaps the prejudice against the parson hunting may date back to the early Georgian times, when manners were as corrupt and dissipated as at the time of the Restoration, without the wit and elegance which characterised the later years of the Stuarts, and when the private chaplain of the country squire hunted, brewed the punch, and was by no means a credit to his cloth. I have, however, a sneaking fancy that some of it may be traced to the Rev. Sydney Smith, who, when he came into Yorkshire, found himself rather out of his element amongst his clerical brethren of the East Riding, all of whom were keen horsemen, and most of them good ones. Sydney Smith was a bad horseman, and was in misery when across a horse, and he gave utterance to the opinion that “a parish priest had no business to ride.” I don’t wish to be uncharitable, but I fancy that if he had been as great a horseman as he was a wit, he would have said that “every parish priest ought

to ride." Archbishop Harcourt, who ruled over the see of York wisely and well for many years, once asked him if he thought it permissible for an Archbishop to ride, and the reply was, "Yes, if he did not ride too well." The Archbishop, who was a fine horseman and a keen sportsman, gave Sydney Smith his first preferment.

I think that all whose privilege it was to know him, or who have read his inimitable books, or who have studied the story of his life of self-sacrifice and devotion to his profession, will admit that Canon Kingsley was an honour to the Church of which he was a member. Canon Kingsley was a sportsman in the best sense of the word: by riverside he was an expert; in the hunting field he could hold his own with the best, and he relates how, long after he had given up riding to hounds, he went out on his old cob to see hounds draw a covert. They found, there was a scent, hounds came driving past with a hard-riding field in their wake, and as he watched them in their career he felt a pride and a pleasure in the knowledge that his friends knew that he could ride.

It is a remarkable fact that when a parson does hunt he is generally a finished horseman. Some, of course, who take to the sport late in life, with the special object, perhaps, of looking after their youngsters, can scarcely be said to witch the world with noble horsemanship, but I reckon amongst my hunting friends many parsons, and certainly a large proportion of them can hold their own with any layman, however good he may be. One I have in my mind's eye now, whom I have seen go well in many countries. Raw youngster, finished and perfect hunter, tricky hireling, he

got them all over a country, and in a good place too. Plough or pasture was all the same to him, and he kept his nerve longer than most men. And in his profession, who so earnest as he ; who so welcome in the cottages of the poor and the home of the ailing ; who so prodigal of his own goods in relieving the necessities of others ? Hard-working parish priest and polished gentleman, it would have been cruel, indeed, to prevent him taking a few hours' necessary exercise and recreation in the way congenial to his own tastes. I look upon this fox-hunting friend of mine as a model for imitation.

A hunting parson, however, needs to be careful how he hunts when professional duties call him at a given hour on a hunting day. A gentleman of my acquaintance had just gone to a new neighbourhood, and hounds met close at hand. They found at once, and had one of those great runs which only happen now and again, and the fox had been broken up. My friend asked, "How far is it to X. ?" Judge of his dismay when he was told that he was some seventeen miles off, for he had a funeral at three, and it was well past one o'clock. His horse was done to a turn, and when he told his trouble he was informed that it was impossible to get to X. in time. So it was on the horse he was riding, but a good fellow who was present helped him out of his difficulty by borrowing a fresh horse for him, and he arrived home in ample time for the funeral. But since then he has been very careful about hunting in a country he does not know when he chances to have an appointment.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HUNTING LADIES

AT one time, and not so many years ago either, the lady who rode to hounds was generally looked upon with mingled feelings of awe and horror by those of her own sex. It was woman's province, according to the satirists who attacked her, to stay at home and look pretty, and to attend to her domestic duties. Even so good a sportsman as the author of one of those Warwickshire hunt songs, for which the country presided over by Lord Willoughby de Broke is famous, writes in a deprecatory manner of ladies hunting. Says he, addressing the ladies :—

Be yours the lyre, the dance, the song,
Whilst we the chase retain.

Now with these sentiments I by no means agree, nor do I believe in ladies being obliged to come out in “the pretty young lady” fashion of a by-gone day, under the charge of a stout old coachman, and with strict instructions not to jump a fence. I like to see ladies going to hounds fearlessly and well; the presence of ladies in the hunting field can only tend to the benefit of the sport, and that more ladies are taking to hunting every day, and taking pains to under-

stand it, is, in my humble opinion, a healthy sign. There is the lady bruiser, she who is described in the words of a well-known writer as "a nice girl enough when she is sitting in a chair, but when she is hunting she crosses you at your fences and jumps on you when you are down." Fortunately ladies of this stamp are few and far between, but when they are to be met with they are unfortunately more objectionable than their brothers of the same class. For they are more reckless, they think that they can commit sins against the ordinary canons of hunting law without being brought to book, and that their sex protects them from the scolding they so thoroughly deserve. Sometimes it does and sometimes it does not, as you shall hear. I have a lively recollection of being charged when in mid-air by an enterprising young lady who had bucketed her horse till she had lost control of him, and of *both* horses rolling over me, and also of the fact that the young lady received all the sympathy, though she was uninjured, whilst I was unable to get any hunting for some days. Another instance of a lady "cutting in" came under my notice. Hounds had been running hard for some thirty minutes over a big country; it was early in the season, the ditches were full of grass and very blind, and anything like taking a liberty with a fence meant almost certain disaster. A man, well known in every country in which he has hunted—and he has hunted in a great many—as a bold and fearless rider, was going well, as usual, and close on his heels came a fearless young lady, who raced her horse past him when he was within two or three lengths of the fence and jumped at it sideways

just in front of him. He said nothing at the time, but if that lady thought she was going to escape without a reproof she was very much mistaken. When the fox was killed he rode up to the delinquent, and anything more cutting than his quiet sarcasm I have never heard in the hunting field. "If you cannot control your horse," he said, "your friends should get you another or see that this one is so bitted that you can hold him. There is no excuse for you crossing anyone at a fence as you did me. Had your horse fallen I might have killed you. It would not have been my fault, it is true, but it would have destroyed my pleasure in the sport for ever. In hunting, as in other walks of life, it is your duty to consider others." Then raising his hat he left the lady, who, I am glad to say, profited by the advice which had been given her.

It is a mistake to think that ladies know nothing about the minutiae of hunting, and that woodcraft to them is an unknown mystery. I think that there is quite as large a percentage of ladies who go hunting who can tell you when hounds have a line and what hounds have it, when the young ones are running riot, and when by some unlucky accident they are running heel, as there is of the sterner sex, and I know several ladies whose word I would take, were I a huntsman, quite as soon as that of any man. Such knowledge is unnecessary and unladylike, I hear some prudish-minded person say. Not at all, I say. Anything worth doing is worth doing well; the woman who studies woodcraft and understands the niceties of the sport not only enjoys it more,

but from the very fact that she has the intelligence and energy to master a not very easy subject it may be safely laid down that such of the duties of life as fall to her lot will be efficiently and cheerfully performed. I have known hunting ladies in different social positions who were fine horsewomen and accomplished sportswomen, who in every relation of life were successful, respected, and beloved.

I knew one, the daughter of a farmer not too well endowed with this world's goods, who used to school her father's chasers, and school them to some purpose too, and more than one persistent refuser did she turn into a reliable jumper, thereby bringing grist to the family mill. As a manager, as a business woman, in the drawing-room, and as a daughter and a wife, she was an example to many of the effete school who look on the hunting woman as masculine.

A hunting lady whom I do not care to meet in the field is the hard funkier. She may not be quite so bad as the bruising rider to whom I have already referred, but she is by no means a pleasant companion to have by your side when hounds are running hard over a big country. She goes at all her fences as hard as she can gallop, and depend upon it that Assheton Smith's dictum, that whoever rides *very* fast at a fence is funkier it, is true. This can only last so long, and it is sure to end in the long run with a nasty fall if the horse keeps on jumping. But generally this is what he does not do. After going so far he refuses, frequently just in front of you, and at one of the few practicable places in the fence. You have to pull your horse out of his stride, which,

when he is beginning to feel the pace, upsets his temper, and you lose much valuable ground, which upsets your own. Avoid by all means the hard funkier of either sex, but particularly if a lady.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MAN WHO HUNTS FROM TOWN

A FRIEND of mine, himself a good sportsman, once observed to me when speaking of a mutual acquaintance, "So-and-so has no business to hunt—coming out and riding over people's land. He does not own nor occupy an acre, and on that account has no business in the hunting field." I pointed out to my friend that the fact of a man owning or occupying land scarcely gave him an inalienable right to ride over the land owned and occupied by others. I showed him that the gentleman in question was a good fellow, fond of sport, a subscriber, and a man who was never in the way. Not a very fine nor a very bold horseman, certainly, but he never made himself ridiculous, and by all, except my prejudiced friend, he was welcomed in the hunting field.

I take leave to say that if every hunting man shared the prejudices of my friend, hunting would soon cease to exist. Hunting, as a selfish sport, would never be tolerated, and though large fields are a constant source of anxiety to Masters of Hounds, the theory of "the more the merrier" is the one for hunting men to follow.

For the man who hunts from town I have a very warm corner; indeed, had it not been for

accident I might have belonged to the body myself, and I certainly deprecate the manner in which some affect to treat of the sportsman who hails from the big towns. It is true that he is probably ignorant of the technicalities of the sport that he loves. He may not know much of the habits of foxes or the points of a hound, and his riding may not be that of the finished horseman. But just let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves the question how much some of our country acquaintances know of the natural history of our quarry, or how many of them take the trouble to know one hound from another. It is all very well to laugh at our friend from town when he speaks to or speaks of old Chanticleer or Bonny Lass, and say they are the only hounds he knows, but it is better to know one hound than none at all, and some very good men of my acquaintance, who hunt four and five days a week, and are always in a good place, don't know a hound in the pack, and vote a day on the flags a bore.

The man who hunts from town is an example of how strong the sporting spirit is implanted in the Anglo-Saxon race. Some, of course, will tell you that when he has become rich he takes to hunting for fashion's sake, or to indulge in a little pardonable vanity. For my own part, I prefer to attribute his taking to hunting to a love of the sport, and a sincere wish to attain some degree of excellence in it; and it must be owned that, considering his opportunities, he succeeds fairly well in accomplishing that wish. I can point to many business and professional men, the bulk of whose life has been spent in warehouse and office, who can hold their own when hounds run hard, even if the fences should come thick and fast.

The man who hunts from town is really one of the great mainstays of hunting. Generally, not always it is true, but generally he is a liberal subscriber to the hunt of his choice. He is always willing to join in any plan which is likely to give pleasure to those over whose land he hunts, and he is a good fellow, cheery, and hospitable. But he is more than this. His healthy mind in healthy body, the result of days spent in the saddle; his cheerful voice and hearty manner give the lie direct to those maudlin humanitarians who would put an end to all sport for the simple reason that they have not nerve and pluck enough to join in it themselves. For it is principally in cities, amongst a physically idle, luxurious, and sentimental class that the humanitarians have their strongholds, and the man who hunts from town is a rare corrective. His breeziness and his practical knowledge of the world do much to dispel the vapours of the maudlin.

Referring for a moment to my friend's remark, I would point out that there is in every man who hunts from town a possible future landowner. I need not insist upon the advantages to a hunt when the new landowner is a man of hunting rather than of shooting tastes. Even the ranks of Masters of Hounds have been recruited from the men who hunt from town, and more than one M.F.H. who has done good service to the cause of fox-hunting has, at any rate, commenced his hunting career in a humble way when he did not own an acre of land.

So by all means let hunting men give a hearty welcome—as indeed they generally do—to the men who hunt from town. Let them be—

To their faults a little blind
And to their virtues ever kind,

for they help to foster a healthy public opinion in favour of fox-hunting ; they keep alive the spirit of sport, which is one of the most cherished characteristics of our race ; and they help to develop "the hardihood and resource which go far to the making of the national character." The luxurious life of cities would have a more deadly effect upon the national character than it has were it not for the love of sport which makes men sacrifice their ease for the sake of a day's hunting, and were it only for this reason we should all of us respect our town sportsmen.

CHAPTER XXXV

SOME TYPES OF SHOOTING TENANTS

It is with respect to their relations with their hunting neighbours that I purpose to deal with shooting tenants, who from one cause and another are becoming a much more important factor in country life than was at one time thought probable or even possible. Time was when it was difficult indeed to hire a decent shooting, and when a man for some reason put his shooting into the market he could afford to pick and choose amongst the numerous applicants who were sure to come forward. I can remember the time when some men, notwithstanding their great wealth, were unable to hire a shooting in certain districts, let their bids be never so liberal. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case, shootings are coming more and more into the market, and it is the shooting tenants who can pick and choose. I use the word "unfortunately" advisedly, for surely it would be better in every way—better for the owner and better for his agricultural tenant—were he able to retain his own shooting, leaving out of the question the fact that the reason why there are so many shootings to let is the terrible agricultural depression which seems as if it had come to stop.

Of course, there are shooting tenants and shoot-

ing tenants. There is the lordly tenant of a Highland deer forest and the man who hires—probably from a farmer who has the game on his farm—150 acres of mixed shooting. With the former of these we have nothing to do here ; about the latter I shall have a word to say. Before I begin to speak of some types of shooting tenants, I wish it distinctly to be understood that with the shooting tenants as a class I have no quarrel, though there are types of them which are certainly objectionable. These, however, may be left for the present, and we will turn to the shooting tenant as he ought to be, and, I am glad to say, as he is frequently to be found. A man whose whole sympathies and instincts were with country life has been forced in his youth by the severe struggle for existence to spend his life in a crowded city engaged in commerce, or in the arduous duties of a profession. His exertions have been crowned with success ; he has made more or less of a pile, and he now begins to yearn for that country life which he feels is, after all, the life for which he was really most fitted. He has the means for the remainder of his life to live his own life, so to speak. During the hard working years that are past he has not had time to think of anything save the business in hand ; what spare time he has had has been occupied with recuperating for a fresh struggle with the world. But now he feels that he can be at leisure, and with the leisure comes longing for the old country life of his boyhood. He has had no means of keeping in touch with riding. He has probably lost his nerve, and does not care to begin *de novo* ; also it is not unlikely that he has grown heavy. But though he cannot hunt, he thinks, and

thinks very truly, that he can walk with the guns, and that by dint of practice he may be able to do something in the way of knocking over his share of rabbits and even an old rocketeer. So he straightway looks out for a shooting, and he is not very long in finding one. Now our typical shooting tenant may not be possessed of any accurate knowledge of woodcraft, but he has strongly developed what, for the want of a better phrase, I will call the instincts of woodcraft. Though he recognises that he is not able to "join the glad throng that goes laughing along" in pursuit of that noble animal the fox, the memory of that happy day five-and-thirty years ago, when he went so well on that rough-coated shaggy pony of his farmer relative, is still with him, and he recognises quite as clearly that he must preserve foxes for his neighbours. So he says to his keeper, "No fox, no Cox," and the result is that he has both foxes and pheasants. What can be more enjoyable than to be an honoured guest at one of his shooting parties, unless it is to be one at the lawn meet of the county pack at his hospitable house. On the former occasion you can shoot till you are tired; pheasants and hares and rabbits are all round you, and there is a noble bag to contemplate at the end of the day, for this kind of shooting tenant invites men who can "hold straight." Of the creature comforts I will not speak, for they are sure to be of the best. And when there is a lawn meet you know that it is not like some lawn meets you wot of; it is not merely show and parade. The grin of delight on the face of the huntsman as he tastes the cherry brandy handed to him, and gives expression to the hope that "they'll find one to give

'em another such a dusting as that fox they killed at 'Thornley Beeches three weeks ago,' tells you that. And in that snug patch of gorse not half a mile from the principal pheasant coverts they do find such a fox. Ruddy coated and bright with white tag to his brush, look at him as he speeds across the pasture! There is not a break in his fur; he is all that a fox should be—handsome, alert, and bold—and as hounds come streaming out of covert on his line he gives one whisk to his brush and sets his mask for some distant point, which he is as likely as not to make good. And who so sure to be in the first flight as hounds race over the big pastures as the son of the founder of the feast if he be arrived at man's estate. He has hunters of the best, you may be sure, and "the governor," worthy man, expects him to *ride* them, in which, to do young Hopeful justice, he is rarely disappointed. That this shooting tenant comes out with a noble subscription to the hunt, if a subscription be needed; that he is at once popular with the gentry, the farmers, and the labourers it seems unnecessary to say, and by all his neighbours he is looked upon as an acquisition to the country. Happy in his surroundings, and in his associations with that country life which seemed to be a far-off vision in the days of his youth, he is a man to know and admire. He did his duty manfully when it was to be done, and every one who knows him rejoices that his lines have at last fallen in pleasant places. Nor is this any fancy sketch that I have been drawing. The shooting tenant of this class is a man whom it is not difficult to meet with. I know him well; I have shot and eaten his pheasants, for he gives his game away liberally.

I have hunted his foxes, and, better than all, I have heard him dilate with pride on the prowess of some old veteran who has beaten hounds time after time, and who "will make some of you fellows look out for new horses before you kill him, by Jove, sir!"

The next type of shooting tenant who claims consideration is, in some respects, a mild reflection of the good fellow of whose good qualities I have spoken; but in the great essentials he differs from him. Like our friend, he has been an industrious and hard-working man, toiling early and late; like him, he has succeeded in making his pile, and, like him, he has a fancy for a country life, and elects to take a shooting. But here resemblance ends. His is a *fancy* to take to a country life; to our friend it was a *taste* inherent in his blood. Shooting Tenant No. 2 takes to a country life as a means to an end, the furtherance of his political or social ambitions, and those of his wife and daughters, who give themselves airs that would be amusing were they not offensive.

Now the gentleman whom we have under consideration wishes to do everything *en grand seigneur*; it is his desire to stand well with his neighbours; he probably subscribes to the local hunt; and he certainly entertains largely and with princely magnificence. He says it is his wish to preserve foxes, he invites the M.F.H. to bring his hounds to his house for a lawn meet, where his liqueurs are dispensed to all comers with profusion. But everything is spoilt by his overweening sense of his own importance; you feel when dining with him that you are drinking MY wine and eating MY

venison, and you consequently don't enjoy your dinner. When you go to shoot with him you are not at ease, for MY pheasants are so much plumper and glossier in plumage than any one else's, and MY keeper is such an "ama-azing clever fellow," that you think it a pity to shoot them, and you let a good few go by for the subsequent benefit of the "ama-azing clever fellow" aforesaid.

As I have said, he poses as a fox-preserver, and in the summer-time he talks largely of the breeds that he has on his estate. "My foxes are all that foxes should be," and to listen to him and his keeper, foxes are as plentiful as leaves in Vallombrosa. To do him justice, there always is a breed of foxes in his coverts, and on occasion I have known even a couple of breeds. What comes of them, though, is quite another matter, and is one which is known only to his head keeper—to whom, by the way, he is an abject slave. What takes place is something like this :—As soon as the cubs have got nicely on their legs the old vixen goes away on a hunting expedition some night, and never returns. The cubs are either taken up for a short time or their earth wired, and they are fed regularly till the young pheasants are well on the wing. Then they are given their liberty, but they are still fed, and they lead an easy life till hounds come cub-hunting. Then there is a fine show of cubs ; Mr. Keeper and his servant, Mr. Shooting Tenant No. 2, see not fewer than fourteen or fifteen ; hounds catch a brace, and everything seems *couleur de rose*. This is what happens as hounds are going home. "Jim," says our old friend the huntsman, calling his first whipper-in up to him, "how many foxes did you see?"

“Not more than two brace and a half, sir,” is the reply. “How many did you see?” addressing the second whipper-in. “A brace and a half, sir.” “See any old ’uns?” (speaking to them both), and the answer is, “No, sir.” “No more did I,” says our huntsman, and then he sums up the situation. “Four brace—killed a brace of ’em; leaves three brace of cubs, and no old ’uns. Shan’t find any of these when we come agen.” And then he adds, “When old Squire Tophthorn lived here we never had less than four or five breeds, and we never came without finding.”

The cub-hunting season is over, and it is quite time that our shooting tenant’s foxes should have another bustling up. But that would never do. My coverts have not been shot, therefore hounds must not come into my coverts. So the weeks pass by till the coverts are shot, and a goodly number of the slain has been recorded in the local papers, and then comes the great day of the lawn meet. The shooting tenant’s town friends, male and female, muster in force, and show themselves off to advantage, as they think, whilst they are gathering subject for six weeks’ conversation when they return home. It is altogether a showy scene, but you can easily see what old Ben, the huntsman, thinks of the proceedings by his taciturn demeanour and the look of disgust upon his face. I should not like to be the one of his satellites to ask for a favour this morning, and the man would need to have the persuasive powers of an angel to coax a loan of a shilling from him. He listens in grim silence to the eloquence of the man in velvet, who discourses fluently about the foxes he has seen in the Oak Coppice, and the Fir Clump, and the

Willow Bed, and the Home Wood, and when that worthy ceases for lack of breath, he asks shortly, "Where'll we find to-day?" Then comes a torrent of advice from the keeper, who recommends the Home Wood for the first draw. The Master approaches, the word to move on is given, and Master and huntsman speedily come to the understanding that the Home Wood shall be drawn last. So to the Oak Coppice we proceeded, and then to the Fir Clump, and then to the Willow Bed, and not a sign of a fox can be discovered in any of them. Indeed, they are nearly as conspicuous for their lack of pheasants, of which a fair number were left at the shoot, and which Mr. Velvetten tells his master have been taken by the foxes. All the coverts have now been tried save the Home Wood, into which we will proceed, by your leave, with sturdy old Ben. "Yooi over troi" shouts the veteran, as he draws acre after acre of the covert, till it is about half drawn. Then there is a perfect chorus of view holloas in the middle of the wood, and Ben, in no great hurry, trots up to the holloa. "Just by here he went," shouts an excited rustic, and one or two young hounds feather and own the line, but don't look like making much out. "What is that with broken coat and dissipated, unkempt appearance, with an apology for a brush, and a look of having been up all night ever since he was born about him? Surely that cannot be a fox." But it is, and Jester and Rallywood and Harlequin, gallant young hounds, as yet short of experience, get a view at him and roll him over. Some of the older hounds look on with contempt strongly marked on their faces; Ben rides up, takes the fox from the

young hounds that have killed him, and throws his carcase into a bush, remarking, "Leadenhall Market and mangy to boot," as he draws his hounds out of covert. Nor is this sketch at all exaggerated. More or less pronounced types of this gentleman are to be found all over the country; they err perhaps in the first place from ignorance, but if they remain unconscious of what goes on, they are simpler than I, at any rate, give them credit for. It must be admitted that, in the majority of cases, they wink at the wrong-doings of their keepers to their hunting neighbours, and that being the case,

Such sportsmen as these we good fellows condemn.
I vow we'll ne'er drink a "*Quæsitum*" to them.

There is another type of the shooting tenant to be considered, and he is a man in a different station in life to the two whom we have already discussed. He wants no shooting box; he has no need for any mansion, or, indeed, a residence of any kind. He takes his shooting within easy reach of his own house, preferring it within driving distance. He likes plenty of ground to range over, and in these days he frequently manages to take a decent shooting. He is joined by other two or three, and from the first of September to the end of the season his shooting-iron never cools. He is a man of the towns, and is used to a town life; in all probability he still continues in business, and he takes his recreation in what has been called especially the poor man's sport — partridge-shooting. Frequently, nay, I may say generally, he is a very decent fellow and a good sportsman, working hard when out with his gun, and going home at night

tired and happy, always taking care to leave a hare or a brace of birds behind him. This class of shooting tenant, when a good fellow, affords one of the happiest phases of country life. But when, as happens sometimes, this class of shooting tenant chances to be a wrong 'un, there is no one such a wrong 'un as he, and no one so arrogant.

He goes to look at a shooting which he thinks will suit, and may be safely depended that in making his bargain he will carefully look after his own interests. Once entered in possession of the shooting, it may be pretty readily conjectured that he will not be long before he has raised the ire of the agricultural tenant. He affects dogs, engages a nondescript kind of keeper, and is at work from September to February and then goes on ferreting rabbits as long as it is possible. When his shooting is within driving distance he goes down with his partners or his pals, as the case may be, in a flash dogcart or Whitechapel, drawn by one that can step a bit. He makes an early start, of that you may be sure, for he is of the kind that likes 21s. for a pound. Just let us have one day with him. I think it will suffice. By seven o'clock he is at work, and as he and his comrades are fair shots, they generally get a good bag. But they are pot-hunters. With them the bag is the thing and not the sport, and all is fish that comes to their net. The first few stubbles have rendered a good account of themselves; the shooters have done well, and after a nip at the flask they begin to work the turnips and potatoes. The potato haulm is luxuriant, and affords rare cover, and the sport is good, as hare and rabbit and partridge come to hand. "Tally ho!" See that elegant,

well-grown cub, how he slips leisurely along, startled by a noise which he does not connect with his hereditary foes, to whom he had an introduction a week ago. Our shooting tenant has seen him too; his gun is levelled, and the "little red rover" rolls over stiff. Another gets up and shares the same fate, and the shooting party are jubilant. We will go with them no longer; men like these are past hoping for, and, arrant hypocrites that they are, they will pose as friends to hunting; nay, they are sometimes dependent for their livelihood upon hunting men who may chance to be their best customers. When I come across gentry of this kind—and I do come across them now and again, though, I am thankful to say, it is not often—I am reminded of an anecdote of an old farmer I knew well. He was nothing of a sportsman till well past middle life, and then he "took it badly," greyhound coursing being the sport he affected. Early and late "the dogs" were in his mouth; Sunday and week-day he thought of them and their noble deeds, and even as he walked home from church a word about "the 'ard bitch" would set him off. Once I ventured to say to him that I wondered he never joined us shooting. "Why," said the old man, "ah nivver fired off a gun but yance. Ye see, the foxes had been plaguing the turkeys, and the wimmen folk got vara bad to liv wiv, sae for peace sake I went to get yan. Sure eneof, the fox cam whale ah was watchin', and it was a fine munelight neet, so ah had a fair shot at him. But the gun brast, and ah swore ah'd nivver shoot a fox or try to again. Ah've thowt that owre mony a time syne, and ah've always looked on it as a kind of

judgment for my meanness." He was a rare fox preserver was the old man, and the best of neighbours ; and it is a pity that some of those gentry of whom I have been writing do not meet with a similar experience, and so, like him, become converted.

The surly man, wrapped up in his own selfish interests, who says he won't preserve foxes, you know how to use. The man who has always a specious excuse, who can never account for his coverts being drawn blank, and who lies from "night till morn, from morn till dewy eve," when foxes are the subject of conversation, is more difficult of treatment. Sooner or later, however, you will find him out lying, and then you should know what to do with him without telling, no matter what his station.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A BLANK DAY

A STORY is told of a veteran sportsman who was asked upon one occasion as to what he thought were the three most enjoyable things in the world. As to what was the best he had no doubt, it was a good day with hounds. He hesitated a little before replying to the query as to what was the next best thing, but it was only for a short time, and then he replied, "A bad day with hounds." What was the third best thing was a bit of a poser after that, but after a long and careful consideration he shouted out to his tormentor in answer to the question, "—— it, sir, a blank day with hounds."

Now, though a blank day is a miserable affair indeed, and one which causes the sportsman many regrets and at times heart-burnings, there is something in what the old veteran said, after all, for a blank day is never *un fait accompli* until hounds are on the road to the kennel, and even then I have known the blank day saved by a fox jumping out of a patch of gorse on the roadside and giving us a good run.

Let me give the history of a blank day. You meet a well-known pack of hounds, no matter which and no matter where, you have a good horse under you, the day is all that can be desired, and hope beats high. The first draw is a gorse covert,

thick and strong, snugly situated, the very place for a fox. Anxiously you await the note which proclaims that a fox is on foot, but you await it in vain. Not a note, not even a whimper is heard, and as hounds are drawn out you remark that it is a strange thing they did not find him. Never mind, there are some likely-looking spinneys within easy distance. Your horse has negotiated a fence or two and cleverly jumped a wide drain on the way, and by the time you reach them you have forgotten your first disappointment of the morning. So all eagerness again, you are on the look-out for a start. But "first catch your hare," as the great Mrs. Glasse hath it, and you have to find your fox before you can run him. One plantation after another is drawn in vain. Surely, say you, "there will be a fox in that thick undergrowth," as hounds are put into a particularly promising piece of covert. But no; again are you doomed to disappointment. The last of those likely-looking spinneys is drawn blank. "It is half-past one o'clock and the best part of the day is gone," you remark, as you pull out your sandwich case and console yourself with a pull out of your flask. Then comes the generally hopeless quest, looking for a fox in turnip fields. I have seen many a fox found in turnip fields, of course, but I generally find that when the coverts are forsaken for the turnips it is a bit of a forlorn hope. Still you hope for the best, and after half an hour or more has been spent in this way without result you wonder what next. Master and huntsman hold a consultation, and you are let in for a long trot down green lanes, and now and then a short cut across country, on which occasions your horse

carries you so well over the fences that you get keener than ever, and long for a fox *and* a scent. And now some rather big woodlands loom in front of you. Not such a country as you were in in the morning by any means, but if a fox is there you don't mind that. A fox is what is required above all. So you take your place down wind and listen eagerly for the overture to begin. Hark ! What was that ? A hound speaks ; surely that is right. Now another takes it up, and another, and then three or four more in uncertain fashion ; it must be right, though there is something about the note you don't like, if you chance to be a keen observer of such things. Ah ! there is the whipper-in's rate, "Have a care there ; ware riot !" and then comes that melancholy note on the horn which somehow never is heard save when a young one shows inclination to misbehave in a covert that holds no fox. And so that wood is drawn blank, and another, and a likely patch of gorse on a hillside, and then the December day is fading from the sky, and the master tells you he has come to the end of the day's draw, and when you turn your horse's head homewards you realise that you have had a "blank day." Then it is that you feel the full measure of your disappointment. Till hounds were drawn out of that last patch of gorse you had hope to buoy you up ; but now that is all gone, and every man you meet and who asks what sport you have had, tends to accentuate your misery. In spite of the old fox-hunting squire, with whose opinions on things in general I commenced this chapter, a blank day is a bitter thing indeed, as you are riding home.

And unfortunately blank days have been very

numerous of late years, and they have been numerous in countries that have been well preserved, and that are well preserved. For there can be no greater mistake than to suppose that because foxes are not found, therefore vulpicideism exists, a conclusion to which the tyro very frequently jumps without a jot of evidence. When blank days, or what are as good as blank days, have been of frequent occurrence—I can call to mind at least four within a week—the weather has often been very wild, and scent has been so bad that when foxes *were* found hounds could not run them. Heavy rains and violent winds have prevailed, and under these circumstances it is quite possible the best drawers might miss a fox in thick covert. But the main cause of the blank days is undoubtedly the scarcity of foxes. Where the latter are plentiful a large tract of country is rarely drawn without finding sooner or later in the day. But it is well known that in many counties in England, mange has prevailed for the last three or four years to a greater or less extent. The fell disease seems to recur in cycles, for forty years ago it was very severe in many parts of the north. Of course there is only one course to pursue where it prevails, and that is to destroy all the mangy foxes and break up their earths. This has been systematically done in some hunts, with the result that though, as I have indicated, foxes are now scarce, what foxes there are are clean. From this fact hunting men may take heart. Once let the disease be gone and there is no difficulty in getting up a good stock of foxes, and in a very short time there is every reason to hope that in many countries at least, a BLANK DAY will again become unknown.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HUNTING THE CARTED DEER

THE great Mr. Jorrocks expressed his opinion of hunting the carted deer in no measured terms. The worthy M.F.H. had got fairly warmed to his work when he said, "Talk of stag-huntin'! might as well 'unt a hass; see a great lollopin' beggar blobbin' about the market gardens near London with a pack o' 'ounds at its 'eels, and call that diversion." Now, though I am disposed to agree with Mr. Jorrocks on most of his dicta on the sport of kings, and should be the first to hold with him that "there's no sport fit to hold a candle to fox-'untin'," I think he is a little too severe on those forms of sport which he did not enjoy himself. No one will be found to assert that hunting the carted deer takes as high rank in sport as hunting his wild relative on Exmoor or the Quantocks, or that stag-hunting, even under the best of circumstances, is equal to forty minutes over grass with a pack of flying foxhound bitches. But it is good fun for all that, and those sportsmen who have a chance of foxhounds at their door every day show little taste in depreciating what, after all, is the only form of hunting available to many men who are as keen in the cause as they are themselves. The busy professional man or merchant can rarely afford the

time to hunt with foxhounds. Even in the best stocked countries there is frequently a long draw ; fox-hunting, moreover, entails an early start, which is not always possible for a business man who wants to see his more important letters before he sets out from home, who only has a limited time to spare for his recreation, and who wants his gallop. Were it not for the carted deer this good fellow would lose his sport altogether, and for that reason, if for no other, it behoves a man who has sport of a higher class provided for him and whose lot lies in a happier hunting ground, at any rate in his own opinion, to do all he can to ensure that the hunting of the carted deer shall remain amongst the rural sports of merry England.

The reason I have taken up this subject is that the Archbishop Designate, together with other well-meaning but—on this subject—ignorant persons, have written to Lord Salisbury, expressing their regret that the Royal Buckhounds should have commenced another season. Probably they had been actuated by the diatribes of the so-called Humanitarian League, which has for the last few years been unceasing in its efforts to vilify stag-hunting, and some members of which have told some pretty fairy tales in print about the sufferings of the deer. A man has a perfect right to express his opinion on well-ascertained facts, but he has no right to put down an occasional injury which may happen to a deer to premeditated and wanton cruelty, and this is the line of argument which has too often been used by those who oppose stag-hunting, and, of course, incidentally all other field sports. One of these opponents of sport some few years ago spoke of all hunting men as “ red-coated

ruffians," which may be a fine piece of alliterative invective, but is certainly not argument, and the same reverend gentleman went on to say that "no courage was required in riding to hounds, which brought out no good qualities in man, and that all the credit was due to the horse and not his rider." I shall be glad to mount that gentleman on a certain pulling horse I have whenever hounds are in a big drain country, or to procure for him a certain "sticky" horse I rode a few weeks ago, and set him to follow the huntsman in a quick thing. Of course, the opinion of a man who talks such utter bosh as the gentleman in question is of no value, but unfortunately it does harm with the ignorant.

That the stag suffers no cruelty is patent to the veriest novice who hunts with any well-known pack of staghounds. We hear from the so-called Humanitarians wonderful accounts of the distress of the stag who goes struggling on for miles with heaving flanks, etc. But what are the facts of the case? The stag is the most cunning of beasts of chase, as any one who has ridden after the Devon and Somerset with his eyes open can tell, and the stag that comes from his carriage "like a gentleman" is to the full as cunning as his wild relative on the Devonshire and Somersetshire moors. For it is a mistake to look upon these deer as tame. It is the object of those who look after them to molest them as little as possible; they are fed on the best, and they are never turned out till they are in good hard condition. The powers of endurance of a stag in this condition are immense, and it may be fairly laid down as an absolute fact that many a good horse will be sobbing at the end of what to the stag in good condition is a mere

exercise gallop. For the stag does *not* struggle on when he is beaten, as does the fox. Even in his wild state he will soil, or run to herd in covert long before he is anything like beaten, and when finally set up at bay he has a lot of fight in him, unless very fat and heavy. So when the stag has had just as much galloping as he cares for he takes soil in some pond, or quietly trots into some farmstead, where he will wait munching hay till the deer cart comes for him. That he is not at all dismayed by what lies before him is evident by the coolness with which he looks round him the moment he is enlarged, and the leisurely fashion in which he moves off, whilst if any of those gentlemen who theorise so learnedly about his "feelings" at the end of a run were to try to take him they would tell a different tale. There is, moreover, one well-authenticated case which proves that there is no cruelty in stag-hunting. A well-known Master of staghounds was wont to take the deer he was about to hunt to the meet with the hounds. A flick of his whip would start her, and when, after giving them a gallop, she was taken, deer and hounds went home on the road amicably. I question whether this could be done with a stag, as they are occasionally very savage, but it was certainly done with hinds. Of course, it could only be done in a thinly populated district.

My object in drawing attention to stag-hunting has been to save the sport from the effects of unwarranted attacks, and to point out to hunting men that if hunting the carted deer goes, other and wilder sport will be in danger.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE DAY AFTER THE BALL

HALF-PAST eleven is a late hour at which to begin hunting on a short December day, when there is scarcely light enough left to kill a fox after half-past four, yet frequently do we see that time appear in the list of hunting appointments. "There's plenty of time," your comrade will say to you on these occasions, as you ride to the meet, if you suggest another mile an hour, "it's the day after the ball." And when you arrive at the fixture you find hounds there, with the huntsman looking anxious and not as amiable as usual, whilst his whippers-in are evidently wishing that it were "midnight and all well."

"Isn't it about time to start?" the huntsman will inquire of the Master when by every one's clock it is past a quarter to twelve. But the Master says good-humouredly, "We'll give them another ten minutes, Harry," and it is really high noon before a move is made to the neighbouring covert. And by this time what a field has gathered together! There is always a big field out, for it is a favourite fixture and near a town, but on this occasion the lanes are full and the fields are full, and as the huntsman says when he throws his hounds into covert, "How a fox can get away I'm

blessed if I know." Just have a look at the field for a moment. The ladies are there, of course, looking just as fresh and rosy as if they had retired to rest at a reasonable hour instead of dancing till four o'clock in the morning, and I never did know a lady who felt or looked tired after a ball. As for the men, some of them look a little pale and have more or less of dark marks under their eyes, but then that is only to be expected, for they have other things to attend to after the more serious business of the night is over. Half an hour's flutter—it was unlimited loo in my day—a whisky and soda, perhaps two, and a big cigar or two have to be discussed whilst the events of the past few hours are being talked over. Yes, as usual, the ladies have the best of it the day after the ball, and one lady, who had certainly passed her *première jeunesse*, once told me she had arrived home at six from a ball and had ridden eight miles to covert before eleven. She went all day, too, and, as she always does, she went well.

Meanwhile the hounds have found, and the fox tries to break at the corner from which he went away a fortnight ago. But close to that corner are a lot of people in carriages who are animatedly discussing the flirtations of the previous night. So the fox takes his way back into the covert and is chopped. The Master's temper now is beginning to get ruffled a bit, and he reads the Riot Act. In the meantime another fox has stolen away, and hounds are at once put on his line. For a field or two all goes well, but scent seems not too good; men are eager to "witch the world with noble horsemanship," hounds are pressed, carried

over the line, and a check takes place. Looking black as thunder, and venting, I am afraid, some of his wrath on his whippers-in, our huntsman proceeded to make his cast. A judicious cast it was; hounds hit off the line, and no sooner had they done so than a gallant youth, wishing to show his prowess to *the* partner of the preceding night, and seeing a formidable jump suitable for his purpose, rode at it in fine style like the plucky fellow and good horseman that he is—and jumped right into the middle of the pack, laming Saladin and sending Merryboy and Tarquin squalling. Of course, down came other three or four rash spirits at the same place, and after that all our huntsman's efforts to recover the line were futile.

We soon found a fresh fox, and hounds got on fair terms with him, but there was a repetition of the same rash riding, and sport we had none. The huntsman's face grew still more gloomy as he drew covert after covert, sometimes finding a fox, to lose him in a few fields owing to over-riding, and then some very unlikely places were drawn blank, and it was nearly three o'clock. The field had sensibly diminished in size. Some of the rash youths had got a ducking in larking over the water which abounded in the country, and had gone home. Others had begun to feel the effects of the late hours, and grown tired of the moderate sport, and those who remained were either old stagers who were to be depended upon, or had settled down a bit. Still, it would not do to run any risks, so after consultation between the Master and his huntsman, the latter set off straight across country for a distant covert. This gave the eager ones something to do, for you may be sure he took

them where there was plenty of jumping. After a three-miles gallop the covert was reached, and as he sent his first whipper-in round to the far side of it, I heard him say, "Don't make any unnecessary noise, Jim, when you view the fox away; I shall hear you." And to give Jim his due he didn't. It was very unlike one of Jim's cheery view holloas, but it served its purpose. For, with the majority of the field, the ball was still the absorbing topic, and the huntsman was a couple of fields away with his hounds before the bulk of his followers realised that a fox had gone away. But he was blowing his horn lustily, trust Harry for that. And then for thirty bright minutes hounds ran hard with an improved scent, and ran into their fox in the open, to the great satisfaction of all who were present.

I rode home part of the way with the huntsman, and we talked over the events of the day. I pointed out that scent had improved as the day wore on, and mildly remonstrated with him for "leaving" his field. "Bless you, sir," said he, "there was always a fair scent if the gentlemen would have given hounds a chance. The only way as I could get a start with my fox was to get a start of them, and soon as hounds settled I did blow my horn well. You see it's always the way arter these balls. The young gentlemen sits up a bit late, and they want to show the young ladies what clever fellows they are. And the ladies they take it cool enough. Somehow the women always do take these sort of things quieter than the men do; they see it all the time, though they don't appear to, and it's my belief that makes the men ride all the harder. I'll always maintain that there should be no balls in the

hunting season, leastways only when there's a frost. You see we've missed a real good day to-day; we've chopped a good fox, old Saladin's got jumped on to, and there's one or two good hounds got lamed. Dancin's all well enough in the summer when you can't hunt, but there should be a law against it in the hunting season." And then, as our roads diverged, he wished me "good-night."

I rode slowly on for about a mile, and then I saw some scarlet-coated friends coming along a bridle road. "Where are the hounds?" asked one. "Gone home," was my reply. "Had a nice thirty minutes late, and killed." And then I learned that my friends, ball-goers you may be sure, had made a late start, had thought they would be able to pick us up, and had been riding about all day in the vain attempt.

The great Mr. Facey Romford, on a historic occasion, remarked that "'untin' and drinkin' were two men's occupations." The sentiment is a just one, and if he had added ball-going he would not have been far from the mark. At any rate, he would have had the warm approval of our old huntsman.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ON BEING THROWN OUT

I will sing you a song of a fox-hunting bout,
They shall tell their own tale who to-day were thrown out ;
For the fastest as well as the slowest of men,
Snobs and top-sawyers, alike now and then,
We are all of us tailors in turn.

How trifling a cause will oft lose us a run !
From the find to the finish how few see the fun !
A mischance it is called when we come to a halt ;
I ne'er heard of one who confessed it a fault,
Yet we're all of us tailors in turn.

EGERTON WARBURTON.

THERE is nothing more aggravating than to go out hunting and miss a good run, either by one's own fault or by one of those fortuitous circumstances which are continually happening in the hunting field. Yet never a day passes but what some one is "out of it," when hounds run hard, or even, for the matter of that, when they don't ; and the very best of us have frequently to own that we were not just where we should have been in the run, and that sometimes we have been "thrown out" altogether. It is astonishing how on these occasions we can find excuses for our mischance, and how seldom we attribute our discomfiture to the rightful cause, which nine times out of a dozen is

indecision. An old friend of mine used to sum up the whole art of riding to hounds as being able to tell whether to open a gate or to jump it, which is as nearly accurate as most epigrams, for it is above all things necessary to make up one's mind quickly and to act as quickly if one wishes to see a fast run in a good place.

It is lack of judgment rather than lack of nerve which causes a man to be "thrown out" in a run, and it is curious, by the way, how small a proportion of hunting men even attempt to ride to hounds. Most of them, and those, too, possessed of excellent nerves, ride to some pilot, or take notice more of the men to right and left of them than they do of hounds. And this is made clear by the fact that should the huntsman not be on the spot when hounds check and ask how far they carried the line there are few indeed of the first flight who can tell him with any degree of accuracy. Every one can, of course, tell where they stopped running altogether, but that is another story.

So with so many men not taking notice of hounds it is not much wonder that they frequently get thrown out. For when a man is not accustomed to watch hounds closely, to attend to their cry in covert, and to attempt to discriminate between the cry in covert and out of it, no very easy task, he is heavily handicapped if he chances to be alone or not in the company of one who knows what to look for and where to look for it.

One fruitful source of disaster is neglecting to take advantage of the wind. "It is astonishing," said a veteran huntsman to me once, "how gentlemen will continue to make up-wind casts," and sink the wind is a motto which every hunting

man ought to observe if he wishes to see the most sport possible. A curious instance of this once occurred when I was hunting with a very famous pack. It was with our afternoon fox, and hounds had run very hard for about ten minutes, when they came to a big wood. The moment they came to the wood the bulk of the field galloped to the top of it, actuated doubtless by the recollection that last time they were there the fox had gone away on the top side. But there was a considerable wind, and the top side of the wood was up wind. In company with two or three "old hands," I turned down wind, and warned some of the field to do the same, but without avail. We had not ridden a quarter of a mile when the huntsman's horn and the cry of the hounds told that they were coming our way. And a good run we had, hounds racing for another fifteen minutes, and running their fox to ground in view. There were about half a dozen of us, and we waited fully ten minutes before the rest of the field came up. They were very irate, said the huntsman went away without blowing his horn, which was not true, and blamed everything but the right thing, viz. their persistence in going up wind, for their being thrown out.

A very curious circumstance of the whole field being thrown out occurs to my memory. Hounds found in a gorse covert of about six or eight acres, and ran very hard for about a mile and a half. The country was full of narrow enclosures, it was stiffly fenced, and some of the enclosures were very long. After going a mile and a half the fox was headed, and turned sharply back towards the covert in which he had been found. The field

was divided into two parts, one of the narrow enclosures separating them. Away we all went for about a mile, and then the right hand division, in which there was the Master and huntsman, pulled up. Then also did the left hand division pull up, for by this time some of us had begun to think all was not quite right. And when we came to compare notes it seemed that each thought that the other had hounds. And what had happened was this : After they had run about half a mile back towards the covert, they had turned sharply at right angles behind one of the big and thick hedges, and the narrow enclosures enabled them to get out of sight before the leading horsemen got into the field where they turned. These men, seeing those on their left still riding forward, naturally thought they had hounds with them, and so for another half-mile they rode on before the mistake was discovered. And then for twenty minutes we galloped and jumped before we got to hounds, and, of course, when we did get to them the fun was over.

One very frequent cause of men being thrown out and losing start in a big run is that they are not minding the business of the hour. Hounds are perhaps drawing a good-sized wood—say of some twenty or thirty acres. How are most of the field occupied ? They are talking of the last ball or dinner party, or the entries for the spring handicaps, or the foreign policy of the Government, and their attention is riveted on anything but fox-hunting. Then a good fox breaks in a hurry—as good foxes generally do. The huntsman's horn is not heard, because it is not being listened for, and the consequence is a bad start,

and, if hounds run really fast, a bad place till they check. Then, again, on an uncertain scenting day the same sort of thing prevails. Men often press hounds unduly on such a day, it is true ; but after repeated admonitions and a succession of checks they somehow get the idea that there is no scent, and that there will be no scent that day, and that there is no need to hurry. But if there is no need to hurry, there is every necessity to keep a sharp look-out, for in fox-hunting it is the unexpected which always happens. Scent changes suddenly, hounds begin to race, the careless man loses his start, and unless he be very lucky indeed he is "thrown out."

CHAPTER XL

THE FROST

So full of frost, of storm.—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

IT has come at last, and that in good earnest, and old hunting men have seen the signs of it for a week past. Day after day there has been a scent, and wet mornings have changed to fine evenings with just a snap of frost, or else the rain has, at some time of the day, given signs of changing to snow. Day after day, too, the thermometer has registered a minimum of a degree or two of frost, and this has generally made its appearance in the early morning. "Yes, it's sharp enough now, sir," my groom has said morning after morning, "but there was not much frost till after seven of the clock." All this pointed to a stoppage of hunting, and now the stoppage has come. I think there could not be a more conclusive sign that the stoppage has come to last a little while than the sight I saw the other morning. As I was passing the Club I saw three of our hardest riders earnestly consulting together and looking at something. It was not a thermometer either. It was their respective bicycles which were occupying their attention. Now I question greatly whether any of the gentlemen to,

whom I allude has so much as seen his bicycle since November ushered in the season of seasons, and I took it as a sign that, with a philosophy which does them infinite credit, our hard riders had accepted the inevitable.

It looks as if we should have at least a week's frost, but we will hope, at any rate, for signs of a speedy change. Not that a week's frost will be altogether unwelcome to those who have acted on the golden rule, "Gather ye roses whilst ye may," since that early morning in August which entailed such a looking up of button-hooks, and such mighty efforts to get things ship-shape, and have never missed an available opportunity of hunting. Well, the frost has come, and we have an opportunity of comparing notes with our friends in other countries. And we have something to talk about, those of us who have hunted as we ought to do since Christmas. For it was after Christmas Day that the sport began, and although we have not had the run of the season every day, we have had an exceptional lot of good gallops during the three weeks. So for a day or two there will be plenty of occupation for our spare time in talking over the minute details of the sport we have enjoyed. There are, of course, arrears of work to be got through, for most men have correspondents whom they are apt to neglect during a busy hunting season. There are other business calls, too, upon hunting men, and work has to be attended to which has been postponed from time to time because Lord B. met at Hedley-on-the-Hill, the X. at Compton Osiers, or the Y. at Dingley Dell. This way of getting through a frost is so obvious that I will not dwell upon it, and for a moment

will return to the horses. If a man has done his best to act up to the maxim I have already quoted, his horses will be glad of a rest for a few days, and will be the better for it too, for horses have begun to look a bit "tucked up," and though there were not any signs of them getting stale, they were getting sober and sedate, and this means that staleness is within reach. Some men lessen the quantity of corn given to their horses during a frost, but this is a plan I by no means believe in, though I would certainly do away with the allowance of beans for two reasons : first, because beans are of a very heating nature, and, when horses are not doing hard work, are apt to throw them wrong ; and, secondly, because when the time comes for hard work again, and come it will, the beans will do infinitely more good when they have been discontinued during a period of comparative ease. I always give my horses their full allowance of oats, rather more carrots than in open weather, and plenty of slow work, either in the fields or in the straw yard. If a good big fold yard be convenient you can have your horses as fit during a storm as at any time.

But the man has to keep himself fit as well as to keep his horses fit, and this is by no means so easy a task as it seems. When a man is hunting five or six days a week, he is naturally in excellent condition, and it is also unnecessary to say that as the hunting five or six days a week naturally entails long journeys and consequent early rising, he does not go out much, dinner parties he eschews, and lives plainly and goes to bed early. But when a frost comes, if he is a social being—and what fox-hunter is not ?—there will be arrears

in the shape of dinner parties to rub off, and dinner parties, pleasant as they are, have a fearful effect upon condition. There is only one help for the hunting man under these circumstances—he must walk. The gentlemen to whom I referred early on were on cycling intent, and there is no doubt that cycling is an excellent way of keeping in condition. But there is nothing in my mind which is so good for a man when frost puts a stop to his hunting as good long walks. A five or six miles' walk in the morning and another before dinner will do much to keep him in condition, and if he follows the example of a well-known veteran jockey, and walks both ways when he visits his friends, even a dinner party won't do him much harm.

CHAPTER XLI

A DAY ON WHEELS

DURING the thirty-five or six seasons' hunting which I have enjoyed, it has only once or twice been my lot to hunt on wheels. I have had many a day on foot, and have run till I was exhausted after Beagles. I have been reduced to a hack and had to ride to points accordingly, and once I fell in with hounds when riding a hack, and found out that the little 15.2 mare I was riding could go with the best of them, with the result that she was immediately put "on her promotion," and carried me for many seasons, and her skin now forms a rug in the room I am writing in. But, as I said before, to hunting on wheels during this fair spell of sport I have been almost a stranger. Of course I have seen a good deal of the people who hunt on wheels in all sorts of countries, for there are at least in every good country, people in carriages and dog-carts who are as regular in their attendance at the principal fixtures as are the scarlet-clad members of the hunt. The aristocratic victoria or landau and pair, with liveried coachman and footman, and containing a party of fair ladies, who prefer this way of seeing hounds to the dangers and delights of following them across country; the smart pony in the dog-cart, with many furred rugs,

which you scarcely need telling belongs to the well-to-do publican and his wife ; the waggonette and the homely spring-cart are all found as regularly as the day comes at every place where it is possible for a decent amount of sport to be seen on wheels. But amongst the regulars, as they may be termed, there is generally one who has, in the days of his youth, taken an active and leading part in the sport which he is now obliged to look at from a distance. His heart is with horse and hound yet, and his fine eye to hounds and knowledge of a country enable him to see many a good run, or, to be literally correct, much of the leading incidents in many a good run. If you have powers of observance you won't require to have him pointed out to you ; the quiet air of thoroughly knowing what he is about, the absence of that exuberant excitement which generally distinguishes those who hunt on wheels, mark him as a man *sui generis*, who knows exactly what he is going to do and does it.

"Needs must," when a certain gentleman drives, and as it was impossible for me to ride, I recently availed myself of an opportunity of seeing hounds on wheels. I hired a dog-cart, and took care to obtain the owner as driver, a man who knows every nook and corner of the country, who is full of anecdote, and who has the history of the country, and other two or three, for the last five-and-twenty years, at his fingers' ends.

There was a large muster, and at first I was too fully occupied returning the greetings of friends to take much notice of my companions of the road. However, at last hounds moved off to try a wood some three-quarters of a mile from the lane. Then

I had an opportunity of reviewing the situation. There were a formidable lot of us and no mistake, and as each person seemed inclined at first to take up some favourite position, the line extended for more than half a mile, and I thought to myself that if a fox broke on our side of the wood, his chance of getting well away was a bad one, unless he was a very bold fox indeed. Eventually, however, the carriages and dog-carts got grouped a little, so that there were places where a fox could cross the lane without being headed. I could not help wondering as we stood in the lane watching the field assembled at the corner of the big wood hounds were drawing, why some people go out hunting on wheels. It was pretty evident why that party in the landau had come out, for they were discussing a very substantial luncheon and were exceedingly lively over it, their proceedings reminding me not a little of a racecourse luncheon when one has backed two or three winners at good prices. Certainly they could not have come out to hunt, and they soon moved off, apparently satisfied with having seen the meet. But the others one would naturally think had come out to see sport, for they waited patiently. Yet what a noise they made. There was a group of charming young ladies, who had apparently walked some distance, and who were eagerly discussing "fashionable topics, such as pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses." A farmer on foot was loudly criticising the huntsman for omitting to try a plantation about the size of a bar parlour on his way to the big wood, and altogether there was in the lane a perfect babel of sound, for some school children joined in with occasional artistic, but

totally unnecessary, imitations of the huntsman's horn and holloa.

At last the wood was drawn blank, as our critical farmer friend had said would be the case, and then there was a redistribution of forces. Most of the carriages kept on the high road, but, in company with a hunting farmer, who was taking his children out for a Christmas treat, I turned down a grass lane and waited. What a weary wait it is, and how slowly time passes when one waits in such circumstances! Not a soul to see, not a sound to disturb "the ambient air," save now and again the shrill voices of the children, or the more matured and sweeter tones of our young lady friends in the lane. Hark! what is that? Horses, and coming at some pace, too; strange we have not heard them find. Bah! it is only a couple of silly fellows galloping their hardest because they know no better. Surely that must be a scarlet coat that glinted past yon big hedge? Yes, it is, and here come the whole field, the far covert having been tenantless. Now for the little snug gorse at our feet. It, too, is drawn blank, and then we turn away again on to the high road, and trot along for some mile and a half to another big wood, which the kindly huntsman had told us would be his next draw. There we arrived just as hounds did. Hark! what was that shout—"gone away, away"? "It is nothing but those noisy brats," said my coachman. "It is the noisy brats, but they have seen a fox," was my reply, for there is no mistaking the holloa of man or boy who has *seen* a fox. And no sooner had I spoken than a holloa from a well-known sportsman told that he had seen him too. And there he was,

sure enough, going apparently to certain and sudden death, for he was heading straight for hounds, and *they saw* him. But, like Ney, he was "the bravest of the brave," nothing would turn him from his point, and, giving hounds the slip that time, he set his mask for a fine country. What a rush and a scramble there was as men rattled across the road in their eagerness for a start.

"Plenty of room in front, gentlemen, and plenty of water, too, to judge by the appearance of some of you." Then men got fairly settled to the work, the merry chase went gladly fleeing away, and, as I turned for home, I quoted the lines of the poet :—

Go where glory waits ye,
And when fame elates ye,
Remember me.

My experiences of hunting on wheels have not been many, but there is one other that I must recall if it is only to point a moral. Many years ago, for my sins, it fell to my lot to drive two ladies to see hounds. The fixture was a fashionable one, and one, moreover, where carriages were generally plentiful, and I knew every nook and corner of the country as well as the run of the foxes. So I determined to start late so as to avoid the rush of the carriages and enable my fair companions to see a fox and as much of the fun as possible. I enjoined upon them the necessity of silence, and they promised faithfully that nothing would induce them to holloa. So we set off gaily enough, and as we got within hail of the first covert I heard that hounds were running, and running hard to boot. Soon I saw a fox pop his head

out of the hedge and take a look round, and then as hounds were hard at him he broke covert. My companions had not seen him, nor did they catch sight of him till he was three parts of the way down the field. Then promises were forgotten and the two ladies holloaed lustily—they had powerful soprano voices ; the fox heard and hesitated for a minute, some tail hounds came up and got a view at him, and he was chopped. The huntsman said nothing, but he looked. Need I add that the ladies were jubilant and wondered at my silence and generally depressed appearance? That huntsman's look haunts me yet when I think of it.

CHAPTER XLII

EARTH-STOPPING

ONE of the great worries which a Master of Hounds and his huntsman have is to get the earths stopped efficiently, and especially is this the case in countries where the sandy nature of the soil enables foxes speedily to open out fresh earths. That useful functionary, the hunt earth-stopper, whom we see represented in old sporting prints, and who was in his day pretty nearly as great a man in a fox-hunting country as the harbourer is with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, is in a great many hunts no longer to be found, and pity it is that it is so, for earths were always better stopped when he was in office.

Nowadays in many hunts the earth-stopping is done by the keepers, and it is to be feared that it is too frequently done in a very perfunctory manner.

Our friend in velveteen, anxious that there should be plenty of foxes always when hounds come to draw his coverts, and knowing, perhaps, that the stock of foxes is scarcely up to the requirements of the country, for some reason or other is terribly afraid that hounds should kill a fox, or, at any rate, that they should kill more than one when they come cub-hunting. So he carefully

omits to stop one or two earths, so that if the fox is hard pressed he may save himself. But something very different to what the keeper wishes takes place. Hounds come a second time to the coverts; they draw the whole range of them and they don't find, for the simple reason that all the foxes are underground.

Some years ago I remember a very remarkable instance of this. We had been cub-hunting early in the season, and a finer show of foxes I never saw on any estate. Every covert we went into there was one litter or two, and we could not have seen fewer than between twenty and thirty foxes. In the last covert we drew I saw six cross the ride, and hounds happened to get away with one of them, in spite of all whippers-in could do. They killed this fox, and when we went back to draw again, for there was a rumour that there was a sickly fox in the wood, they found again immediately.

With such a show of foxes as this, of course some thinning was necessary, and some two brace were killed, fairly and without any digging. Next time we went to draw those coverts there were only one or two foxes in them, and long before the season ended they were drawn blank. Of course, under such circumstances the number of foxes killed on the cub-hunting day was multiplied by two at least, and the huntsman came in for a lot of blame behind his back. I was riding beside him one day when the coverts were drawn blank, and he remarked that he did not know where the foxes could have got to, for that they were still somewhere in the neighbourhood he was confident. Indeed, it was evident from the hounds that such

was the case. Next season the mystery was cleared up. As soon as the hunting season was over foxes began to be seen about, earths were cleaned out, and there were plenty of litters, and in course of time the cub-hunting season came round again. Very early one September morning, as soon as it was well light, a start was made in those same coverts. I was the only one out except the hunt servants, and we separated, and, as the Yankees say, "kept our eyes skinned." Hounds soon got amongst the cubs, and there was some grand fun for about half an hour. Then the cubs failed to see where the amusement came in; they were tired of it, and they would have no more. As luck would have it, there was a fair scent, and hounds were driving along merrily into an open space in the wood where the huntsman was quietly standing. Suddenly a fox appeared on the scene, trotted quietly away to a group of laurels, and was seen no more. Then another came, and another, and another, and then came the hounds to mark the lot to ground in a very big and strong earth. "That's where my foxes were all last season," said the huntsman. And doubtless he was right. The keeper, of course, was not to blame on this occasion, for he did not know of the earth, but I fancy an old professional earth-stopper would have known of it. I ventured to express that opinion to the huntsman. He made no answer; he is not a talkative man, *but he thinks a lot*.

I can call to mind several occasions where hounds scarcely ever found a fox without his going to ground in a few minutes. And there was a large amount to pay for finds on certain estates with the minimum of sport resulting. A circular

to the keepers pointing out that when foxes were found in their coverts and went to ground in them in known earths the fees for finds would not be paid soon put an end to all that kind of thing.

There is, however, the idle keeper to contend with, the man who does not stop the earths properly, but "puts to" in the morning, and very likely stops a fox in. This is a dangerous gentleman in a hunt, and he does a lot of harm ; for he can easily forget to open the earths out, with a result which is not pleasant to contemplate.

Personally I should like to see the old earth-stopper once more a hunt official ; he generally, nay always, knew a great deal about hunting and the habits of foxes, and when he was in office I had an idea that foxes were less frequently underground when wanted than obtains in the present year of grace.

CHAPTER XLIII

DIGGING-OUT

So ingrained, as it were, is the love of sport in the average Englishman, and so kindly does he take to sport of any kind which opportunity may throw in his way, however unfitted his previous training may have been, that it is not to be wondered at that at times he talks something nearly approaching to nonsense when giving his opinion on intricate subjects in connection with the sport he affects or takes an interest in. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence to hear a man whose Turf experiences may be counted almost by months instead of years give an opinion on a subject with all the authority of an expert which a man of experience like Mr. Matthew Dawson would speak about in carefully-guarded terms. But perhaps there is no sport about which *ex parte* opinions are aired with such assumption of knowledge, not to say superiority, by those who have really little knowledge of the subject, as fox-hunting. Nor is this difficult to comprehend, for perhaps there is no sport which is so popular of which so little is really known by the rank and file of those who follow it, and to realise this one only has to stand by the covert side at some favourite fixture and listen to the crowd, who *ought* to be attending to the business in hand,

but who *are* attending to everything else under the sun, from the last Parliamentary debate to the newest fashion in bonnets. And to listen to what they have to say on the homeward ride, and the opinions they express respecting hounds and huntsman and whipper-in, would confirm the opinion strongly. Nor is it difficult to understand why this is. Fox-hunting, from the breeding of a pack of hounds to accounting handsomely for a fox at the end of a good run, is a matter of intricate science. There are many things to attend to which, small enough in themselves, make up a pretty considerable aggregate, and things of which the ordinary members of the field know nothing. Indeed, they have had little opportunity of learning, but I think they might make more of the opportunities which do present themselves. Huntsmen, though caring little to talk about the riding part of the business, are never slack in imparting knowledge to those who seek it, about hounds, foxes and their ways, and the thousand and one details which make up the science of hunting.

Perhaps there are few subjects in connection with hunting on which more nonsense is talked than on the subject of digging-out. When a fox is run to ground there are generally but two people who know *all* the circumstances of the case, the Master and the huntsman, and certainly in the majority of cases what they decide to do is what ought to be done under the circumstances. Yet no sooner is a fox run to ground than you will hear on all sides the opinion expressed that it is unfair to dig, that the fox ought to be spared, that they are sure to find in such and such a covert, which covert is probably intended to be part of

the draw a few days afterwards ; that hounds have plenty of blood, and do not require to kill a fox on that day ; that it is too cold, or too hot, or too wet, or too dry to stand about digging.

Now I once heard a huntsman say that it was his business to kill foxes and other people's to preserve them, and with a certain amount of limitation he was right. Nine times out of ten, then, you may be certain that when Master and huntsman consider that it is the right thing to dig, it *is* the right thing. To begin with the objection that it is unfair to the fox. This is a sentimental reason, and sentimentalism has no place in fox-hunting. It is not *strictly fair* to go to a holloa. I happened once to overhear a lady express her disgust in no measured terms because a certain huntsman would, and did, dig for his fox and kill him on the earth. A few days after, and with another pack of hounds, the lady was equally emphatic in her disapproval of their slackness, a slackness which was mainly caused by an adoption of the policy which she had advocated only a few days previously.

It may be put down as a general rule that nothing tends so much to discourage hounds, and, consequently, to make them slack, as to leave a fox which they have fairly marked to ground on a bad scenting day. Just see how angry they are for their fox when they are baying at the earth ; how eagerly they watch the engineering operations ; how quick they are to rush in when they think the digging party are near their fox. In the making of a pack of foxhounds it is, I think, of much more importance to kill a fox after a long, dragging, and disappointing day for hounds, than it is when there is a brilliant scent and everything is *couleur de rose*.

After a day of this sort, when hounds have been knocking about all day, I would certainly dig for an *afternoon* fox if I thought there was any chance of getting him, and if foxes were not scarce. If hounds have had a good run, scent has been brilliant, and a good point has been made, then, if hounds are in good blood, a fox may be spared, and a point even may be stretched to spare him. An old friend of mine, a huntsman of some experience, very seldom ran a fox to ground after the first few weeks of the season; indeed, I might almost say after the cub-hunting season. "It is only the bad foxes that go to ground," he would say, "and I never give them a chance of going to ground twice if I can help it. The good foxes get away and save themselves." That there is something in that argument there is no doubt, but I am inclined to think my friend carries it too far on occasion, and I have occasionally seen him dig for a fox in cubbing time when I would not have done so. But I am bound to admit that he has plenty of foxes in his country, that nothing succeeds like success, and that quick foxes which make a good point are very frequently met with, and that he, perhaps, has a better average of sport than most.

But bearing on his theory that it is only the *good* fox that goes to ground at once, there is the following true tale:—A well-known pack of hounds found a fox in a gorse covert, ran him hard over three fields, and marked him to ground in a drain. "Useless brute, have him out and kill him," said the Master, who was hunting his own hounds. So they bolted him, but they didn't kill him, not that day at any rate, for after running

him for an hour, something like an eight-mile point, he fairly beat them, and somewhat modified the opinion of the Master that good foxes will never go to ground at once. After that he always gave them a second chance.

CHAPTER XLIV

WHAT BECOMES OF THE FOXES?

“WHAT becomes of the foxes?” is a question which must frequently obtrude itself upon the hunting man as he jogs home after a hard day. Of course, we know very well what becomes of some of them. Our friends (?) in velveteen are occasionally, let us say, accountable for the disappearance of some of them ; a cantankerous or ill-conditioned owner or occupier of land, who insists on “doing what he likes with his own,” could probably tell us what becomes of others of the family. A sentimentalist, mayhap, gives an odd member of it the happy despatch by means of a powerful irritant poison to save him from the torture (?) of being hunted. We all know that there are few countries where foxes are not occasionally put down in an illegitimate manner ; and, of course, we all know how the cubs are killed in the autumn, and how from November to March the huntsman is keen in his endeavours to get “plenty of blood” for his favourites. The noses on the kennel door tell what has become of a goodly number of the vulpine race ; mysterious nods and whispers of the “I could an I would” kind tell how a few are disposed of.

But what I want to know is, what becomes of

those bold foxes which the agricultural labourer talks over lovingly in the ale-house o' nights "as t' owd fox 'at they nivver hev cotched, and nivver will"? That is a question which, I think, most hunting men of wide experience will have asked themselves more than once during their career, and it is a question which takes some answering. Looking back over a pretty long hunting career, I can remember many foxes which were never accounted for. There was that "bob-tailed" fox; and here let me ask what hunt is there that has not some tale to tell of a brushless fox? For five seasons we ran him, once we actually had hold of him, but even then he beat us. And it was in this wise that we got hold of him. It was the last day of the season; we had hunted into May, and we had run a fox to ground in a drain early in the morning. As there was little doubt about its being a dog fox, and as foxes were plentiful, a terrier was introduced into the drain, and soon a battle royal took place. But the fox would not bolt, so a spade was requisitioned, the drain opened, and the fox pulled out by the whipper-in; and then we saw that it was our "bob-tailed" friend. "Give him a chance," was on the tongue of every one, but I verily believe that every man in his heart of hearts said that at last hounds would kill the gallant fox that had beaten them so often. There was a grim look on the whipper-in's face as he proceeded to turn him down, and he did not give him so very much "law." There was a scent, and away we went again, and a rare run he gave us. At last, after running for some half-hour, fox and hounds were all in the same field, and they were viewing him. But he got

through the hedge well in front of them, and by slipping along the bottom of a dry ditch caused them to overrun the line. By the time they hit it off again—for I need not say the field was on their backs—the fox had put a field between himself and his pursuers, and he managed to get to ground in a main earth, where, of course, he was left. Many were the lamentations as we rode home, and some opined that we should “never see our gallant friend again,” as he was evidently rather severely bitten by the terrier. But when the cub-hunting season came round, and we were again in his country, the first to be seen stealing quietly away was our friend who was minus his brush. We had two good runs with him during the season, and then we saw him no more. What came of him? I know he met no untimely fate in that country—there was no crime considered so heinous as the killing of a fox in an illegitimate manner—but that after showing us any amount of fun for some four seasons and part of a fifth, he “retired from business” is certain.

I knew another fox, a big, fine fellow with a handsome head and a brush which every young fellow who followed our hounds looked at with covetous eyes. His home was a little gorse covert of about three acres, and he always took us over one of the stiffest lines it was ever my lot to ride over. Sometimes he would take one turn round the covert, more frequently he went at once, and he generally broke at the same place, and went nearly field for field over the same line, and we were sure of a seven or eight mile point every time we came across him. And he always beat us. More than once it seemed odds on the

hounds, but our friend always managed to save his handsome brush. Some there were who thought that hounds chopped him ; but I think the listless unenterprising fox that jumped up out of a hedge-back after the covert had been drawn blank, and made no effort to save his life, could scarcely be the same gallant fellow whose usual policy was that of the Tar Wood fox, who

Went away, he was not found.

Several hunting diaries of Masters of Hounds, huntsmen, and others who have been careful to chronicle what they have seen, have come through my hands at one time or another, and in them are frequently chronicled the doings of some gallant fox, whose exploits are spoken of in terms of the highest praise. Time after time in them appears the entry : " Found that good old fox," or " that stout old fox again " ; but somehow it rarely happens that a fox who has earned this character by beating hounds time after time is killed by them, for one would naturally expect the death of such a vulpine hero to be recorded. Well then may the question be asked, " What becomes of the good foxes ? "

CHAPTER XLV

MEN WHO HUNT A LITTLE

Have . . . made a little taste.—2 *Henry IV.*

IT may fairly be said that in a country where hunting is looked upon as the winter sport of all others, the man who wants to stand well with his neighbours will not own to having no sympathy with fox-hunters. However great may be the disadvantages under which he labours, he will “affect a virtue if he has it not,” and to do him justice he generally has it in a more or less modified degree. For there is something very fascinating about the sport of kings, and hunting enthusiasm is as “catching” as the measles. So many a man whose appearance at once tells you that he is by no means at home in the saddle, and who would as soon think of committing a murder as of riding at a flight of fourhole posts and rails of his own free will, finds himself occasionally in the hunting field. He is almost always a man who takes to the sport late in life, so that much cannot be expected of him in the way of witching the world with noble horsemanship. If hounds commence their cub-hunting operations anywhere in his immediate neighbourhood, he is sure to be seen at the meet, and he will not unlikely be busy

making inquiries about the well-being of the puppy he walked, for he is a good fellow, and almost always walks a puppy. Very keen is he when the sound of hound and horn proclaim that a fox is on foot, and should he chance to view a fox over a ride, he is in the seventh heaven of delight. A few days in the cub-hunting season, a very few they will be, for his stud is limited, and often has other work to do as well as to carry him to hounds, will fall to his lot, and then he is sure to turn up at the opening meet of the season. On that day he will be in great force. He will have a full and particular account of the recent cub-hunting season to give to all who care to listen to him, for he generally cultivates the acquaintance of huntsman and whipper-in, and if he should chance to be a farmer he frequently exercises the rites of hospitality on those worthies. He is a busy man indeed on an opening day, and as there is a good deal of the social element, and not a little of the "holiday hunt" on an opening day, our casual hunting man enjoys himself thoroughly, and if he should chance to see a fox killed after a bit of knocking about in the home wood, it is, for him, a red-letter day indeed.

But when the fallen leaf and the sodden ground tell of the joys which are in store for the hard-riding son of Diana, when foxes have learnt that useful mathematical lesson that the nearest way between two given points is a straight line, and when it is incumbent upon a man who wishes to see *anything* of the fun that he should go the nearest way, regardless of the size or stiffness of the obstacles he falls in with, then does the man who hunts a little find that he has other occupa-

tions. Occasionally he will be seen at a meet, and he may go to see a covert or two drawn, but he will not frequently be seen with hounds when the season is at its height.

Yet he will be *au fait* to all that is going on, and his information on the doings of the pack which he so ardently admires will always be reliable. For he is a *sportsman*, this man who hunts a little, perhaps at bottom a better sportsman than some who ride in the first flight in all the glory of the war-paint. No man pictures the woes inherent on a long frost more pathetically than he does, and no man rejoices more thoroughly when the thaw comes and sets hounds at liberty once more.

Towards the end of the season he is seen to great advantage. When the going gets good and the gaps are well down, he is frequently to be seen at handy fixtures, and March and April are to him happy months indeed. But perhaps it is on "the last day of the season" that he is seen to the greatest advantage. Then he is indeed in his element. He will tell you that hounds are only a brace and a half off such a number, which is their record, and that there is every chance of their adding to their score to-day. And if they don't, why we must get the Master to give us another "last day." For the man who hunts a little feels a genuine regret when the season is really over, and is always to be found giving his vote in favour of one more gallop.

A real good fellow, and of immense use in a country is the man whom I have attempted to describe. He is the connecting link between the regular hunting man and the man who does not

hunt at all. He likes the sport, and he enjoys it in his own way, and if that way is not yours and mine, what have we to do with that? He helps to make a healthy public opinion about hunting, and in many ways he contributes to the benefit of the sport. Let us drink his health, and remembering all his good points, let us also remember that a fine horseman is not always a sportsman, and that a man may not be able "to witch the world with noble horsemanship," and yet be a sportsman complete.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE CRITIC

A critic, nay, a night watch constable.

Love's Labour's Lost.

THERE are some things on which it is possible to give an authoritative opinion without any experience. No one, I think, would venture to dictate to an able merchant the way in which he should manage his business, or lecture a lawyer on the nice quilllets of the law unless he had some expert knowledge of the subject, but the veriest tyro can and does express his opinion on the shortcomings of farmers and huntsmen, and talk of the supposed blunders of these unfortunates with a decision which one would think could only proceed from heaven-born genius.

Your critic seldom gives the man whose actions he criticises the credit of possessing any of that common knowledge of which he claims such a superabundance, and it is not a little amusing to hear the hunting tyro express his opinion on the deficiencies of the man, whether he be Master or servant, who carries the horn, and in the case of the former he must be a good sportsman indeed and keen as a knife to bear the unfair criticisms so freely launched at his unfortunate head by men

who never take the trouble to think the matter fairly out, and who actually know very little of the intricate work which belongs of necessity to a Master of Hounds or a huntsman. Nor is the tyro the only offender. I have known men who have hunted for many seasons, and who certainly ought to have known better, make most unfair criticisms on those who undertake the onerous responsibility—and it is an onerous responsibility—of managing and hunting a pack of hounds. I often wonder when I hear the learned dissertations of these gentlemen where they get their information about hunting, and I am inclined to think that their ideas of the sport—their theoretical ideas I mean—are derived from the pages of romance. A man who goes hunting regularly should certainly study the subject in the pages of Beckford and other experts, so that he may have a fair idea of the difficulties which beset the path of the Master and huntsman in the execution of their duties ; but no amount of study will serve the purpose unless there is keen observation in the field. And I may remark how frequently does the man whose hard riding days are over, or even never had a beginning, see and enjoy the niceties of the sport which are missed by some who have a right to call themselves first-flight men. They may not be always there, but when they are there they see what is going on.

One constant subject of adverse criticism is the draw. Hounds are advertised to meet at a certain place. “Oh,” says our friend, “they will draw Bellhanger Gorse, and Dingley Dell, and Breakem Down Thorns.” But the Master draws quite in the other direction. Bellhanger Gorse does what

an expectant country requires in providing a fox, or perhaps two, and then for the afternoon draw there is a long trot of some five or six miles, and a good deal of wondering "why the deuce he goes out of his draw?" The M.F.H., you will remark, is always *he* with his field. They may be certain that there is excellent reason for the proceeding. Dingley Dell may have to be shot next week, or a letter from the place to which the Master actually goes may tell of the depredations of an "old customer," which some non-hunting supporter wants rattling up for some reason or another.

A curious incident happened under my notice lately. Hounds met a considerable distance from the kennels, and we had had a bad morning, scent having been worse than moderate. Now there were two parties, if I may use the phrase, out on that day, one of which hailed from the neighbourhood of a town which I will name X., and the other from a town which I will name Z. The Master and I were riding together, and he remarked, "If I had quite my own way, I should go to ——," naming a well-known covert, "for I know we should find at once, but they would say it is out of the draw, and the X. men want me to go one way and the Z. men want me to go another. I scarcely know what to do for the best, but at any rate there is a little bit of thick covert about two miles on, through which I will run hounds." So off we set to the covert in question, a rough, rather sedgy place of considerably less extent than a quarter of an acre. "Where is he going?" "It's no use going there, there's no covert." "What's the use of wasting time like this?" and

so on was heard in continual chorus. A thick hedgerow or two were tried as hounds went on to the covert in question, and with no result. Then came the chorus again, "What could you expect?" "Of course, there's no fox." "Told you so," and just when the chorus was at its height the whipper-in's "Forrard, away!" told its tale, and a clipping run over a big country was the result. I am obliged to own that it was with an unholy joy that I saw four or five of the noisiest of the critics "take a toss" before we had been going ten minutes. I should add that I never heard of any one who had grace enough to say to the Master that he was sorry for the critical remarks he had made, or even express to any one that it was he and not the Master "who didn't know his business."

CHAPTER XLVII.

NOT A HUNTING COUNTRY

Boy, I do love that country !—*Love's Labour's Lost*.

A RECENT writer on sport writes as follows :—
“ Truth to tell, ours can never be a hunting district. There is a deal of plough, there are many enclosures, and there are such numerous patches of woodland each within a mile or less from the next, that there can never be any chance of a fox leading hounds a decent gallop. Whenever the county hounds do come, they come more with a view of affording a coffee-housing holiday to a mixed throng who know little and care less about the chase, than with any other real object. Pony-carts, bicycles, and foot people make up the greater part of the field. Our woods are drawn in a most perfunctory manner, but generally the Master hardly takes the trouble to do more than run the hounds through some of the coverts, leaving many likely spots, many outlying spinneys, untried, and then trots off about five miles to some more open country, where he has a better chance of getting on terms with ‘the little red rover.’ The foxes which we know haunt the country, and which we may have viewed frequently on previous days, have an opportunity of saving themselves, and we feel

that we have entertained them and guaranteed their safety throughout the year to no practical end." The writer goes on to say that he yields to no one in his love for the chase, and adds : "When all natural conditions are against it, when most of the few men and women in the field are only there because no other amusement is immediately available, and when the subscriptions are so small that everything has to be done on the cheap, it is very much a question whether another sport for which the country is peculiarly adapted, and which gives a vast amount of pleasure to many people, should be arbitrarily sacrificed in its favour."

Let us consider this rather formidable indictment for a moment. In the first place, it must strike any impartial reader that it is manifestly unfair to attack a Master of Hounds and a hunt in such a vague manner. They have no chance to defend ourselves, and a general statement is made which is damaging to the sport of fox-hunting as a whole, and which, on the face of it, seems intended to be such. I am friendly to fox-hunting, says the writer in effect, but it is fox-hunting under such conditions as *I* think fit. He seems indeed a fitting companion for a gentleman (?) of my acquaintance who hunts himself in a fashionable country, but who is a pronounced vulpicide in the country where his property is situated. He, like the author of the diatribe I have quoted, holds that the country in which his property is situated "can never be a hunting district"; I *know* it to be as fine a country as man need wish to ride over, provided he has a clever enough horse to cross it, though I admit I should like a little more grass.

First, let us take the description of this impossible country. "There is a deal of plough, there are many enclosures, and there are such numerous patches of woodland, each within a mile or less from the next, that there can never be any chance of a fox leading hounds a decent gallop." Begging the question, this last sentence, with a vengeance. I should think I have seen a great deal more hunting than the writer, for I have hunted all over England, and I have no hesitation in saying that some of the best points I have ever seen made were made in countries which exactly answer the description given above. Indeed, "a deal of plough, small enclosures, and much woodland at short intervals" describes fairly well a considerable proportion of some of the most sporting countries in the provinces. I was in such a country the other day, and I may say *passim* that the Master, a good sportsman, who likes to have his hunting *and spend his money at home*, felt himself considerably aggrieved at the wholesale condemnation of what I may call rough and wild hunting countries such as I have quoted. I was fortunate in paying my visit on a good scenting day. Hounds found at once, and after *one* turn round a very large wood, a turn which was evidently the result of his being headed, our fox took a six-mile point, hounds running hard all the time (forty minutes), and had they not changed they must have soon killed. Forty minutes with a second fox was not so straight, but in this respect it would compare favourably with some runs I have seen in what are known as fashionable countries, and that it had a satisfactory result the brush which hangs in front of me whilst I write—the

brush of a wild mountain fox—is sufficient testimony.

And let us look at the statement that “in such a country there can never be any chance of a fox leading hounds a decent gallop” from another standpoint. Quite true it is that in some countries this is the case. But why? Those who are acquainted with the ways of men ambitious to exceed the bags of their neighbours when they have their “big shoot” will, I fancy, not require telling. It is a well-known fact that in many places it is customary for the keepers to destroy the vixen as soon as the cubs can live without her, and these poor unfortunates are “wired in” and fed till within a few weeks—aye, sometimes till within a few days—of the hunting season. Indeed, I have seen them still “wired in” when hounds have run another fox into the coverts. I do not wish to infer that this is the case in the country to which reference is made in the extract I have given, but I do know that it is a custom which prevails extensively, and I also know that wild foxes in a wild country are not given to dodging about when there is a good pack of hounds behind them.

Now about the composition of the field when hounds come to disturb this shooter’s paradise. Hounds come, we are told, more to afford a mixed coffee-housing throng a holiday than with any other object. It seems to me to savour somewhat of impertinence to judge of a man’s motives in hunting the worst part of his country. The palpable motive is to hunt the country fairly, and by so doing please the farmers who live on that side of it. The idea of coming to give a mixed

coffee-housing throng a holiday is, I should say, far from the thoughts of the Master of Hounds who is criticised, and exists, I should think, only in the fertile brain of the critic. "Pony-carts, bicycles, and foot people," we are told, "make up the greater part of the field." Well, is that to be imputed to the Master of Hounds as a crime? I trow not. I have seen some as good sportsmen in traps, on bicycles, and on foot as ever I saw clothed in all the glory of the war-paint at a crack Midland fixture. Sometimes, it is true, the pony-carts and the bicycles get into the way and head foxes, and the stentorian voices of the foot people are an injury to the sport they wish to aid. But I think I have seen a scarlet-coated gentleman on a two-hundred-guinea hunter head a fox upon occasion when eager to secure a good start; and who that goes hunting does not know the warning cry, "Give them a bit of room, gentlemen, do!" The question I want to ask is this: If people in pony-carts, on bicycles, or on shanks' mare enjoy hunting and its surroundings, is there any reason why they should be deprived of their sport and enjoyment to satisfy the prejudices of a shooting man? I can see only one answer to the question. There exists no reason; there can exist no reason for such deprivation. Shooting, we know, is only for the few, and in its essence there is something of selfishness; but sport exists for the many. If it did not it would soon cease, and when people in traps, on bicycles, and on foot behave themselves fairly and don't spoil sport—and it is only fair to say that it is generally through ignorance and excitement that they err, as mounted friends do upon occasion—I for one am always glad to see

them enjoying in their own way the sport of kings.¹

The sins of the Master of Hounds in question are manifold. After calling in question his motives in hunting a country his methods come in for criticism. "The woods are drawn in a perfunctory way, and the Master hardly takes the trouble to do more than run the hounds through some of the coverts, leaving many likely spots, etc., and then trots five miles away, etc. The foxes which we know haunt the country, and which we *may* have viewed frequently . . . are left in undisturbed possession, etc." The "*may*"—italics are mine—liketh me well. This is really such an old story that it is amusing. A Master of Hounds comes to draw coverts where he is practically sure foxes are scarce, even if they are there at all; he draws the most likely of them; he sees no sign of a fox, and he goes away for his afternoon draw to where there is one to save a blank day, and to give *the coffee-housing, holiday-making crowd* a gallop. Methinks our critic doth protest too much. If the object of the Master of Hounds be to afford a holiday to a coffee-housing crowd it would not matter how he spent his day, and he might just as well spend his time in looking in outlying spinneys for the fox which has been—I beg pardon, which may have been—so frequently viewed when hounds are not in the neighbourhood, but which is always conspicuous by his absence when they are there. I know that fox

¹ *Note*.—It must be understood that with the special circumstances to which the writer refers I have nothing to do. It is possible that in one instance a country may be badly hunted. It is the general deduction of the writer which I combat. No more pernicious doctrine can be enunciated than that a shooting man shall tell a hunting man what is a hunting country and what is not, which is what I have quoted practically amounts to.

well. I have known him for thirty-five years. He is the biggest fox "wot ever wos."

It is plain enough to any one who can read between the lines that, unfortunately, the Master of Hounds in question has to deal with a district in which foxes are not preserved as they should be, and that he knows it. Mind, I do not suggest that the writer is guilty of vulpicide; he appears to have a grievance, first against hounds for hunting the country at all, and secondly, against the Master for the way in which it is hunted. I have said it before, and I reiterate the statement, I can prove it amply if necessary, that the best estates for game that I know—and I have a pretty wide knowledge of shooting estates—are where foxes are well preserved, and where the shooting is never allowed to interfere with the hunting. I can name them in one county after another, estates where big bags are made, and where the head of game is quite as much as the ground will legitimately carry. So, if our shooting friends get keepers such as are to be found on the estates I mention, their grievance, I take it, would vanish.

Now from the particular I must pass on to the general.

A long list of conditions, more or less imaginary, are given under which it is told it is very much a question whether shooting should be arbitrarily sacrificed to another sport. The country is unknown to me in which shooting is arbitrarily sacrificed to fox-hunting.

Unfortunately, many countries are well known to me where fox-hunting is *unnecessarily* interfered with by the arbitrary conditions imposed by the shooting tenant and his keepers. And now to

examine these conditions. "When most of the few men and women in the field are only there because no other amusement is immediately available." This is begging the question with a vengeance. The poet tells us that

Genius is peculiar to no skies,
And may hereafter even in Holland rise.

And if genius, why not the love of fox-hunting? Is that necessarily confined to the grass countries? And because a man cannot afford to keep half a dozen two-hundred-guinea hunters at Melton or Harborough, is he therefore to be prevented from enjoying his favourite sport on a £50 screw in the cramped and woody country in which his lines are cast? Perish the thought. And suppose that the contention is right that most of the field only hunt because there is no other amusement, is that any reason why they should be deprived of their only amusement at the bidding of those for whom it is no amusement? There is no reason that I can see.

Then again the question of subscriptions is raised, and we learn that when the subscriptions are so small that everything has to be done on the cheap, it is a reason why hounds should not be kept. A more selfish and one-sided way of looking at the matter I never came across. Why should a man's sport be stopped because he cannot afford the expense of the cut-'em-down countries? Is a man to be deprived of hunting altogether because he lives in an unfashionable country where it is impossible to obtain a big subscription? If it became a question of subscription alone many a country which has an historic name would soon be

eliminated from the hound lists. All honour to the plucky fellows, say I, who with limited means and in face of opposition keep "the tambourine a-rollin'," and all honour to the Master, who, probably not a rich man himself, spends some of his substance on keeping up the pack.

And it should always be borne in mind that even in unfashionable countries some people may be kept at home by the fact of there being a pack of hounds there, who would otherwise spend their time and their money elsewhere. I know of at least two such cases. One gentleman, a man of vast wealth, hunts what, with the exception of a small portion of it, would be looked upon by the gentleman I have quoted as an unhunttable country. Immense woodlands, near together, small enclosures, etc., is a good description of two-thirds of it. Excellent sport is shown by a good pack of hounds, and foxes are plentiful, and they are accounted for satisfactorily. And not only during the hunting season, but for most of the year the gentleman resides at home. Were it not that he could hunt at home he would take himself and his wealth into some other country. It is scarcely necessary to say that the hounds over which he presides with such marked ability do more good in the country in an economic sense than would forty game preservers. Another instance occurs to my memory. In just such a country as this which I have been speaking of, save that it was a two instead of a three days' a week country, the subscription was about £350 per annum, of which £260 was the payment made to the Master. A useful balance was generally carried forward from year to year, and I believe

only once in something like twenty years were the guarantors called upon to make good a deficiency, and then they were subsequently repaid. It was a poor hunt ; a captious critic might say that people only hunted because it was the only amusement available ; but I have no hesitation in saying that it turned out some of the best sportsmen that ever wore scarlet or buckled on a spur, and that no better sport was shown throughout the length and breadth of the land. Hounds were bad to get to at times, it is true, but difficulties only exist to be overcome, and some one always managed to be there.

According to the theory promulgated, both these hunts should be disestablished in the interests of game preservers.

With the writer of the article in question I have no quarrel. He claims to be friendly to fox-hunting, but as I have shown, it is only to fox-hunting as he knows it, and according to his standard. But his theory is a most pernicious one, and carried to its logical conclusion it would put an end to hunting in half the countries in England. As I have before pointed out, there is no reason why fox-hunting and game preserving should not go on side by side in all countries, as they unquestionably do in some, and given a keeper who knows his business it is easy enough to obtain this desirable end.

I may conclude with the remark that amongst my acquaintances I number more than one who were keen fox-hunters till their nerve failed, and till they could no longer go in front. These gentlemen have developed a keen liking for shooting now ; they pose in theory as lovers of hunt-

ing, but they are the most difficult people with whom a sorely-tried M.F.H. has to deal. I refrain from giving my opinion on these gentlemen ; what that is I may leave to the imagination of my readers.

One word more respecting the writer of the attack. The attack may be justified in some particulars, though I have shown that in the account given by the critic there is nothing to lead a man who can read between the lines that it is. Every M.F.H. is not a sportsman, and the M.F.H. in question may not draw his coverts properly. But he has been given no opportunity to defend himself, and the generalisations made from the particular instances are not justified by the facts of the case. These generalisations aim at the very foundation of fox-hunting, and as the author of them says he yields to none in his love of the sport, so may we fox-hunters answer, "Save us from our friends."

CHAPTER XLVIII

BY INVITATION

Still invites

All that pass by.

Timon of Athens.

“IN days of old,” where a country was not hunted by some local magnate each yeoman and farmer used to keep a hound, and at certain fixed times these worthy souls would repair with their hounds to some neighbour’s house, not infrequently a public-house, whence, after sundry libations to Diana, the goddess of the chase, they would repair the wily fox to slay. They were not a trencher-fed pack ; the trencher-fed pack was a creation of a later date, and was the result of the necessity of continuous action and a continuous policy if fox-hunting was to be adopted, as it ultimately was, as the winter sport of the nation. In these pre-historic days every man hunted his own hound, several men carried a horn, and staunch indeed must the hounds have been which killed a fox at all with the babel of noise which was, in those days, one of the concomitants of fox-hunting. It is by no means impossible that these gatherings of sportsmen, when Mr. Jones brought his Towler, and Mr. Smith brought his Towler, and Mr. Johnson brought still another Towler, and so on,

were the forerunners of those "invitation" days which are frequently occurring in the present generation, and which are a source of much anxiety to Masters of Hounds and hunt servants.

When hunting became established all over the country on a firm basis, when subscription packs were formed and hunt clubs became the order of the day in the provinces as well as in more fashionable districts, Mr. Jones and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Smith, with their respective Towlers, of course, became things of the past. But old customs die hard at any time, and more especially was this the case in the beginning of the century. Then it must be remembered that the boundaries of countries were ill-defined; there was a great difficulty in getting to the outlying districts of a hunt, expense was a matter for consideration of the most careful kind, and, as a consequence, there survived in many districts a few scratch packs of hounds which hunted occasionally, and which belonged to some wealthier yeoman or farmer who resided far from the centre of any of the newly-formed hunts. They gradually were done away with, as the countries adjacent were better and more regularly hunted, and when fox-preserving and the regular drawing of a country became better understood. But until that took place they were not only tolerated, but appreciated by their more orthodox neighbours, with whom they were generally on the best of terms.

So we read in the diary of Mr. John Andrew, the first Master of the Cleveland, that in 1817 the pack joined forces with Rickaby, of Swainby, by invitation, to hunt some of the country which lay on the borders of the Cleveland. "We took nine

couples and Rickaby six," writes Mr. Andrew, and then, after relating the run, he says, "Two couples of ours were first at the kill, then a couple of Rickaby's. All ours were up but one couple." Curiously enough, this custom of joining packs, which one would think modern developments would have rendered obsolete, still survives in some places, and only a few years ago the Thurstonefield, a well-known Cumberland pack, had a joint hunt with the Abbey Holme, a pack which does not figure in the hound list, but which shows rare sport in a rough, wild country.

In its more modern form, however, a meet by invitation means one pack of hounds going to hunt in the country of another through the courtesy of the Master of the latter. Sometimes the invitation is given because foxes are rather scarce in the country of the invited ; sometimes it partakes of the nature of a personal compliment to the Master invited, and nothing else. Such was the case when Mr. Thomas Assheton Smith, who was then the Nestor of the Chase, was asked to take his hounds, the Tedworth, to hunt in the Quorn country, with which his name is inseparably associated. On that occasion the fixture was Shanks on Holt, the field was numbered by thousands instead of hundreds, and the famous Hampshire squire was so touched by the compliment paid to him that when he had occasion to "read the Riot Act"—as he was sure to have to do with such a monster field—it was remarked by one who knew him well "that it lacked the usual Hemphasis."

It is the exceptional size of the field, and the extra amount of jealousy which is astir when the

hard-riding members of two hunts meet in any numbers, which contribute to disturb the equanimity of those in office. The visiting Master does not like to get angry with those of whose hospitality he is partaking, and I am afraid they frequently take advantage of their position by being a little over-keen. Then generally these invitation days take place towards the end of the season, when scent is indifferent. I remember on one occasion, as we were going to have a day in a neighbouring country "by invitation," our Master interviewed us jointly and severally, and lectured us on the heinousness of over-riding hounds. "When you men see me hold up my hand," said he, "pull up, then the other fellows will. I don't want to do any 'rating' to-day." We found a fox, scent was only moderate, and as a matter of course hounds were pressed. The Master's hand was held up, and we stopped. But did the other fellows? Not a bit of it. So we went on too; but fortunately scent improved; fences were a bit bigger than usual, and all ended happily.

But notwithstanding the occasional drawbacks to which I have alluded, the "invitation meet" is a pleasant reunion of sportsmen, and if there should chance to be anything of a scent and good sport, affords happy memories for many a year.

CHAPTER XLIX

FARMERS AND FOX-HUNTING

THE relations between farmers and fox-hunting have been the subject of discussion and comment ever since fox-hunting was a regularly established sport. In the latter part of last century John Marshall, himself an ardent sportsman and one of the leading agriculturists of his day (he was a member of the Royal Agricultural Commission), wrote on the subject, and though his article was never printed, it covers the subject perhaps better than it has been covered by any one since. In effect John Marshall says : "I am a keen sportsman ; I would do all that is in my power to further the sport of my friends and neighbours, but I should stand firmly on my rights as a farmer if any wanton damage was done." I think this fairly represents the position which is recognised by all fox-hunters who are worthy of the name ; but since the days when John Marshall hunted and farmed many changes have taken place, and a class of men have taken to hunting, and capital sportsmen some of them are, which a hundred years ago were never seen in the field. These men know little of rural life ; the hours they have spent in the country have principally been spent in the pursuit of sport, and they know little or nothing

of those things, seemingly of little importance in themselves, yet which mean so much when taken in the aggregate. With the increase of the size of fields it stands to reason that more damage will occasionally be done. And it would scarcely be fair to class all the damage done as wanton damage, though undoubtedly a great deal of it is the result of more or less culpable carelessness. In the days when John Marshall flourished nearly every one who hunted—and there were few who hunted in those days, when in the provinces a score horsemen made a large field—was brought up to a country life, and knew what damage he was doing when he did it, therefore the words wilful and wanton would fitly apply to the harm they did ; but as I have already pointed out, though much of the unnecessary damage done in the present day may be the result of carelessness, a great deal may be attributed to ignorance. It may be laid down as an axiom that no damage should be done of which carelessness or ignorance is the cause. A man who goes out hunting should learn to discriminate between maiden seeds and ordinary stubble ; he should endeavour, when shaping his course over grass, to go where he will do least damage ; he should also take care to break down fences as little as possible. I remember an instance of a farmer being exceedingly irate at one of his fences being broken down, and he threatened all sorts of pains and penalties if ever men crossed his farm again after hounds. The man was a personal friend of mine, and I expostulated with him. “ You would never summon me,” said I, “ and I was the first man to cross your land.” “ No,” was the reply, after a moment’s hesitation ; “ you

did not pull my fences down." Though the mending of a gap is not a considerable expense, the unnecessary multiplication of gaps causes annoyance to a farmer even if he be one of the keenest of the keen.

What is the best way of paying for the damage that is done by large fields, and what is the best way to get hunting men to buy their provender direct from farmers, are questions which have been much discussed, and many plans have been suggested. The plan as to damage which has been adopted in some countries, and which works fairly well, indeed better than any other that I know, is to divide the country into districts, and appoint in each district one or two farmers of position to assess the damage that is done, which, when certified by the proper party, is at once paid by the secretary of the Damage Fund. There are some people who make an outcry about their accounts of damage being scrutinised, and assert that it is an infringement of their veracity. In other words, there are certain ill-conditioned people who think they have a right to charge anything they like for damage incurred, and ill-advised friends are at times to be found who advocate their cause in print. I think it does not admit of question that no profit should be made out of a payment for damages, whilst the actual damage done should in some way be made good. But only the actual damage should be paid for, and the apparent or imaginary damage should be left out of the reckoning. The man who is best fitted to assess the damage is, it stands to reason, a man resident in the neighbourhood, who knows all the circumstances of the case as no one else can know them, and where the plan is adopted,

there is very little friction on the score of damages.

As to all the elaborate plans for the registration of provender in the hands of farmers, they are, in my opinion, simply useless. In the first place, many hunting men have no knowledge of the quality of corn and hay, or of their value, and it is equally true that there are some farmers who are ignorant of what is really required in the way of provender to keep hunters in the highest state of efficiency. Neither can a groom be well spared to run about the country looking for hay and corn, and a man may be the best stud groom in the world and have no knowledge of the value of provender. But there is a very simple plan by which the farmer and the consumer may deal directly—one which has been practised in more than one country I know of, which works smoothly and is less expensive and less troublesome than any system of registration. The hunting man employs a dealer to buy his corn, hay, and beans, directing him to buy the best and give the top market price and to buy from a farmer resident in the country in which he hunts, or if he cannot be supplied in that hunt, then from a farmer in the neighbouring one. The farmer delivers his provender direct to the consumer, and is paid by him the full price; there is no groom to tip, and the farmer receives the top value for his produce, the dealer charging the purchaser the usual commission. Nothing can work more smoothly than this plan, and it is certainly the cheapest way of bringing consumer and producer into direct contact.

That fox-hunting only exists by reason of the goodwill of the owners and occupiers of the soil is

admitted on all hands, though it is equally certain that only a course of fatuous indifference to the rights and feelings of what may be generally described as the landed classes would cause fox-hunting to be suddenly abolished in the United Kingdom. Fox-hunting exists by sufferance, but the sufferance is of an active rather than of a passive nature. We have, of course, to take things as they are in a great measure, and as things are, fox-hunting is an institution which is firmly established in the country. But as I have pointed out, though fox-hunting is firmly established, the rights of the landed interest must be recognised by hunting men, or otherwise hunting will be in danger. But if farmers should be considered, if their prejudices even should be treated with respect, and if it is the duty of hunting men to endeavour to get more in direct touch with farmers in the purchase of their provender, these obligations imply others on the part of the farmers, who, if well treated by hunting men, should certainly act in reciprocal fashion. I have spoken of the farmer feeling annoyance at unnecessary gaps being made and at fences being jumped close to a gate when hounds are not running. In his own interest I would point out that it is desirable for a farmer to have his gates in such condition that they will open easily. He will find that gates which open easily will prevent a lot of gap-making and unnecessary jumping. It is by no means an uncommon thing in some hunts for farmers to be paid considerable sums for covert rents, the coverts generally being planted on the worst field in the farm. Now one would naturally suppose that this implies that the coverts should

be kept fairly quiet, but I am sorry to say this is not always the case. I know of one covert—it is not more than three and a half acres in extent—for which a rent of £6 per annum is paid; the value of the land for agricultural purposes is perhaps 10s. per acre. During eleven years one fox has been found in the covert. Now I am only stating the fact, and I imply nothing. I do not suggest for a moment that the farmer kills foxes, but there are rides cut through the covert at intervals, and it is obvious that it is never quiet, the farmer and his friends being always on the hunt for rabbits. Of course it would be folly to continue to pay rent for this covert under the circumstances, yet I make no doubt that when the M.F.H. ceases to pay rent the farmer will imagine he has a grievance. Another case which came to my personal knowledge will scarcely commend itself to those who advocate fair play. The rent of £17 per annum was paid for a covert of some eight or nine acres, the agricultural value of the land being about 17s. 6d. per acre. Hounds were advertised to meet in the neighbourhood, and though it was quite possible that they might not require the covert, it was equally likely that they might. Four days before the hunting day the covert was shot by a party of several guns, and on the very morning that hounds met some rabbiting was indulged in. Of course the covert was drawn blank. It is only fair to say that the lessor of the covert expressed his sorrow at what had taken place, which he said was due to inadvertence, and it is also right to say that such a thing has not occurred again, but had the lessor of the covert thought of others, had he, in other words, treated

fox-hunters with the same consideration with which he and his fellows claim, and justly claim, to be treated, it would have never occurred.

Then again, there is the great question of wire. As was said to me by a farmer a few weeks ago, "Wire is cheap fencing, and times are hard," and we cannot expect farmers not to use such cheap fencing. But in a hunting country where many people live and spend their money freely who would live elsewhere were it not for the hunting, we may fairly expect farmers to take down the wire, or where in exceptional cases this cannot be done without serious inconvenience, to put up a warning. If a country is extensively wired it stands to reason that hunting, or, at any rate, riding to hounds, becomes impossible. That the farmer would suffer, and that materially, were fox-hunting to cease, is evident; the breeding of light horses would soon become a profitless occupation, for the motor car has come to stay, though its influence may not be felt for a few years. It is, therefore, to their interest to foster a sport which induces gentlemen to live in the country and spend their money there, and in this direction it may be suggested that the money which is directly spent over hunting is but an unconsidered trifle in comparison to the amount which it indirectly causes to be spent. Moreover, when farmers are fairly treated by hunting men they should return fair treatment, and should not, whilst taking with one hand, refuse to give with the other. It is not necessary to go into details respecting the various means which are adopted in different countries respecting wire, but I may mention that in one country with which I am well

acquainted there are upwards of three hundred farmers who take down the wire when the hunting season opens, and that without pay. This speaks well both for the hunt and for the farmers, and I believe that within the limits of the hunt in question the only farmers who had not taken their wire down were two men who hunt regularly, and are the keenest of the keen. This is merely want of consideration, to which, indeed, all the cases which I have mentioned may be attributed. But it is a want of consideration which causes endless inconvenience and trouble, and which certainly ought to cease.

CHAPTER L

IN THE WOODLANDS

I am a woodland fellow, sir.—*All's Well that Ends Well.*

ONE of the most curious things in connection with fox-hunting is the wide divergence of opinion amongst the rank and file as to what is or is not a good country, and it has been my lot to hear a fine open country spoken of slightly, and the wild fells and mountains of Cumberland and Westmoreland extolled as the most sporting countries in the world, though, *bien entendu*, it is impossible to ride in them, and a man must be a good traveller, as they say in the district, if he sees anything of the sport. Similarly, one frequently hears a man who has hunted in the Shires, or in some locality nearly as favoured with wide spreading pastures and small gorse coverts, speak with barely disguised contempt of such and such a country as a woodland country, and should any one say of it that it is a good woodland country he will give him an incredulous stare.

Somehow it seems to have escaped the memory of many hunting men that originally most hunting was confined to the woodlands or wide open moors and commons, and that the gorse covert is an innovation of comparatively recent date. It is

not, I hope, necessary to point out that because I am going to say a word for the woodlands that I therefore do not appreciate a quick find in a gorse covert, but what I want to urge is that it is the woodland hunting in which the science of hunting is learned, and it is generally the woodland fox that is the stoutest, the wildest, and the most difficult to handle. I may remark, *passim*, that the other day a gentleman was speaking in no very complimentary terms of fox-hunting. He said that he infinitely preferred the drag. "You have no waiting," said he, "you gallop straight away, knowing well that you are running no risk of falling in with wire, and you have not to trail about for hours without doing anything." Which is perhaps the modern version of the saying attributed to Lord Alvanley, "What fun we could have if it were not for those d——d hounds." Well, a man with sentiments like the foregoing had better read no farther. He is no sportsman, though he doubtless labours under the delusion that he is, and for him the beauties of hound-work are not.

That woodland foxes, as a rule (there is no rule without an exception, mind), take most killing is admitted by most huntsmen who have had any experience. Nor is the reason for this far to seek. The fox whose home is in the big woods almost invariably gets a start; the quickest of huntsmen has great difficulty in getting hounds away on "the top of his back," and he consequently has the time and opportunity to display that cunning for which his race is proverbial. Then the huntsman has to exercise all the woodcraft at his command, and keep eye and ear open from the moment his fox is found to the time he is killed,

run to ground, or lost. It is rare, indeed, it would not be incorrect to say that never is a huntsman able to gallop down a woodland fox. Of course with a woodland fox it is as indispensable to get a good start as it is with a fox from a gorse covert, but the woodland fox is on the alert sooner, he gets away quietly, at times he gets away without being seen, even by the lynx-eyed whipper-in who is sent on to view him away. Then if there should be a scent you have a run indeed.

There are, I may remark, amongst the gentlemen who despise woodland hunting, some who believe, or who affect to believe, that when you go into a big wood with hounds you are never out of it all day, and that hunting in a woodland country is one prolonged season of cubbing. Nothing can be wider of the mark, and if you don't keep your "eyes skinned," as our American cousins say, you are pretty sure to be well left when hounds are in the woods. Indeed, woodland hunting may be said to teach a man to ride to hounds quite as much as it teaches a huntsman his craft. For in a woodland country above all things it is necessary for a man to keep close to hounds all the time. He must learn to discriminate when hounds turn in covert ; he must be able to distinguish when they are running out of covert ; and he must be able also to make up his mind quickly as to how he will get to them. A good horseman is as much needed in a country of this sort as he is amidst the oxers of Leicestershire and the doubles of Meath. Frequently, if he means to be with hounds, he will have to leave the beaten tracks and rides in the woods and ride his hardest through

scrub and rough covert to get that start which is necessary.

When a good fox is found in a big wood—they are not all good ones in the woods, bear in mind, any more than they are in gorse coverts—he generally contrives to make a turn or two round the wood till he can see an opportunity of getting well away. In other words, his knowledge of woodcraft is naturally greater than that of his fellow who is reared in more artificial surroundings. And when at last he does break covert, if you have not been mindful of what hounds were doing in covert, and if you have not kept stored in your memory the subterfuges of this particular fox and his ancestors, you will probably get to the place where he broke in time to see the foremost horsemen a mile away, which may be very pretty from the spectacular standpoint, but which will not tend to the improvement of your temper. But do not anathematise the country ; rather blame your own inattention. Once your woodland fox has left his home he makes a point, if there is a scent sufficient to press him, for it must be borne in mind that good scenting days make good foxes. Probably his point will be six or seven miles off, and if woods come in his way he will skirt them or run through them, even passing open earths, to accomplish the object he had in view. Then when arrived at the wood he set out for, he will begin to exercise his cunning, if hounds are still sticking to him ; cautiously will he thread the thick undergrowth ; anxiously will he watch for a clear road where he can slip away without being seen ; down the gutter at the edge of the covert he will crawl ; then, availing himself of the shelter of a thick

hedge he will make good his start, and it is by no means improbable that he will save his brush by going to ground in some earth within his knowledge, which he has passed earlier in the run. Some of the best runs I have seen during a pretty lengthy experience have been with the woodland foxes, and one in particular from a wood several hundreds of acres in extent occurs to my memory. Immediately the fox was found he made a ring round one corner of the wood, and a grand sight it was to see how, by the exercise of his cunning, he kept increasing the distance between himself and his pursuers, till at last when he broke he had fully a couple of fields the best of the start. Then he ran straight through another wood some four miles off, and finally was killed after a good run of an hour and a quarter, an eight-mile point. As for the riding part of it—well, dirty coats had plenty to say about that.

CHAPTER LI

SOME DEPREDACTIONS

Subtle as the fox for prey.—*Cymbeline*.

“HE is a good fellow,” said a farmer to me, as we were riding on together to meet hounds a few mornings ago, “and I believe him when he said that we should find a good show of cubs, and that his daughters had lost a lot of poultry, and were anxious that we should kill at least a brace.” Then, after a moment’s pause, my companion added, by way of rider, “You know all bills for poultry damage are not so reliable as they ought to be,” which latter, I take it, is a matter that is well known to many a sorely-harassed secretary of the Poultry Fund. It is scarcely necessary to point out that a bill for damages may be made out with perfect *bona-fides*, and yet be quite unreliable, simply because the man who made it out had little

¹ I have read “Marmaduke’s” letter for some time past, with much pleasure. I venture to give him one instance of how foxes are blamed for carrying off poultry when they may be quite innocent. It may be of use to you, to come under “Some Depredations.” I hunt a pack of foxhounds in the north, and we are not bothered with complaints from poultry-keepers. But last autumn a claim was sent in for compensation for the loss of “two hen turkeys, carried off by the fox.” The birds were running, their feathers were found, a fox had been seen to run through the farmsteading, and a friend (female) of the farmer’s wife thought she saw the fox with a turkey in his mouth. Luckily the claim was not paid, for when a small field of corn behind the house was cut, the two missing turkeys were found sitting tight on eggs.

knowledge of the habits of the supposed delinquent, and a few instances which have come under my own knowledge may perhaps be interesting.

The first that occurs to me is that of a poor man who lived near a large wood, where foxes were plentiful, and where, I am glad to say, they still are plentiful. His occupation was a small one, and he relied greatly on his geese and other poultry to make him a little money to turn his hand with. He was a clever man with poultry, and could always rely on making the top price for his geese at the Christmas markets. Judge, then, of his dismay when one fine morning he found that all his geese had been taken off by the foxes. There could be no mistake about it; there was blood and feathers enough to show that the foxes had come, not in single spies, but in battalions, and with a sad heart the old man went to interview the Master of the Hounds. I should say that the hunt in question was practically a farmers' hunt, that subscriptions were, naturally, rather limited, and that it was the general custom to pay for poultry damages in kind. The Master went to look at the place where the geese had been housed, and he thought it quite possible that the foxes might have got them away, and, indeed, there seemed no reason to doubt that they had from the signs that he saw, though he rather wondered at them going in such wholesale fashion in one night. Moreover, there were feathers about some well-known earths. There was no doubt about the poor man having lost his geese, and so it was forthwith, and very properly, determined to pay him the full value of his loss. It, curiously enough, happened that a farmer who resided near a fox

covert lost some turkeys a day or two afterwards, and, though he made no claim, the fact was made public enough. Now, this extraordinary voracity on the part of the foxes exercised the mind of a country policeman no little, and that intelligent officer—I believe he rose to the head of his profession, and if he did not, he deserved to—acting upon a few trifling incidents which had come casually under his notice, paid a domiciliary visit to a certain quarter on the night before the Christmas market, and there he saw a sight sufficient to make the mouth of any intelligent officer water. Geese, beautifully dressed, with giblets tastefully arranged, and neck-skins filled with blood ;¹ turkeys, plump of breast and snowy of skin, met his eye, and caused him to smile sarcastically, as he asked their ostensible owner where he had obtained them. The answer not being satisfactory, he requested the company of the gentleman on whom he had made such an untimely call, and the result of his visit was that that worthy ate his Christmas dinner at the expense of Her Majesty. The pleasing feature of the case was the promptitude with which the man who had lost his poultry came forward to repay the hunt the money that it had given him, which, of course, was not taken back, as the old man had, unquestionably, sustained a loss.

The next case happened several years after that just recorded. A farmer, well-to-do, lived in a place which of all others was the most awkwardly situated for any one who had large quantities of poultry, for fox coverts surrounded him on all sides, and the number of foxes in the district may

¹ In the North the blood, mixed with oatmeal, is put into the giblet pie.

be best gauged by the fact that hounds drew one of the coverts within a short distance of his home five or six weeks running, and never drew it blank. To his honour be it said, though no fox-hunter himself, he never either directly or indirectly molested a fox. Nor do I think that he ever sent in a bill for poultry, for the Master, who was a farmer, and he were firm friends, and he was wont to let him off with a grumble about what his daughter said. So matters went on for a few seasons, when one day I met him boiling over with rage. The vocabulary was about exhausted in abuse of foxes, and he threatened all sorts of vengeance. "I would not care," thundered he, "for a few old hens and geese, but when the —— foxes come to take *sheep* it is more than flesh and blood can bear." And straightway he produced a bill a mile long in which he claimed damages for something like fifteen sheep—full-grown sheep, mind, not lambs.

There was only one thing to do, and that was to wait till he was pacified a little, and then promise him that his claim should be taken into consideration, and if the foxes had killed his sheep he should be paid for them. But the foxes had no more killed his sheep than I had, though he took some persuading that that was the case. It was in the year when the liver fluke worked such destruction amongst the flocks of the country, and though his was a healthy district, he had chanced to buy a few sheep that were tainted. An odd sheep or two had died, their death in all probability being hastened by the extremely severe weather which set in, and as they were on the edge of a moor they were not missed for a day or two.

Then when the storm became prolonged, foxes, driven, perhaps, by hunger, began to eat the dead sheep, for my friend avowed that he had seen one of them at work. But he had never seen a fox attack one of his sheep, nor would he, though no doubt a hungry vixen will occasionally pick up a newly-dropped lamb. However, at last he was persuaded that the foxes had not done him such grievous damage, and his bill was paid in this fashion. One day after the storm broke up, hounds met within a mile of his house, and we had a capital day's sport, killing a brace of foxes, each of them after a good run. In the second run there was a good deal of jealous riding, for most of it was over a good country, and they killed their fox in the field adjoining our friend's house. "It is Miss ——'s brush," shouted the Master, before any one could lay claim to it, and it was hard to tell whether father or daughter was the more delighted with the compliment. "You must send in your bill for the poultry, Miss ——," said the Master. But the lady shook her head, and her father would not hear of such a thing as making a charge for a few hens, and he produced a formidable stone bottle, and entertained all those who would be entertained in liberal fashion. And that was how his bill for the sheep was paid.

"Oh! Jemmy Thomson, Jemmy Thomson, oh!" said Lord Byron once, when he was criticising, and not without cause, the author of *The Seasons*, and the words of the noble poet might well be used by a fox, if he could speak. For the line in which the genial bard speaks of the fox as "the nightly robber of the fold," is just about as great a stretch upon the imagination as any that

was ever penned by poet. The fox has plenty of sins to answer for without being blamed for decimating our flocks. A hungry fox will certainly take a weakly, newly-dropped lamb, and I believe that in mountainous districts, such as obtain in some parts of Cumberland, the small lambs of the native breed are not safe until they are several days old. But in the lowlands, or even in the hills where game is plentiful, and where the sheep are of larger size, it is rare indeed that a fox will attack a lamb. The fact of the matter is that the poet was thinking about wolves and writing about foxes, but, unfortunately for the character of the fox, the accusation has stuck. In the meantime, if those gentlemen who think that the foxes are going off with their choice lambs would keep a sharp look-out, they would find in the majority of instances that the culprit was a dog, and in all probability one belonging to themselves.

Yet once on a time, some forty years ago or more, there was a well-authenticated case of a fox taking lambs wholesale, the history of which I shall proceed to relate. A well-known and enterprising country gentleman had bought, at considerable outlay, a valuable flock of Southdown ewes, of which he was very proud, as they were the first of the breed that had been seen in his neighbourhood. In due time they began to lamb, and then, after a short time, lambs were destroyed at the rate of about one or two a night. Sometimes they were taken away, but more frequently they were partially eaten and left in the field. Of course it was set down to foxes at once. The Master of the Hounds was interviewed on the subject by the shepherd,

but pooh-poohed the matter. "Foxes," said he, "did not take lambs of that size ; look out and you will find that it is a dog." So the shepherd did look out, and morning after morning he went to watch. At last, after watching for two or three mornings without result, he fell in with the delinquent in the act. There was no mistaking the sly countenance, those pricked ears, that brush swung over his back with a defiant twist when he was disturbed, and that long, low, stealthy stride, bespeaking pace and endurance. So off went the shepherd to the Master of the Hounds with his story, and as the shepherd was a truthful man, and, moreover, a keen sportsman, the Master believed his tale, and told him to shoot the fox, as a lamb-worrier was no good to any one, and would do infinite damage before the next season came round ; and here I must add that the season had just terminated.

So away went the shepherd, and after watching for a couple of nights, the fox came into the field and began to prospect the lambs. It was about five in the morning, and the shepherd, perhaps rather too anxious to secure the depredator, instead of killing him outright, hit him hard. The kennels were not far off, so he made the best of his way to them, told his story, and the Master immediately consented to hunt this fox to death. Within an hour of the time that the fox had been fired at he had hounds in the field, and they at once took up the line and hunted steadily on in the direction of a well-known fox covert which lay not very far off. Through this covert they carried the line, and then getting on better terms with their "fox," they rattled along for some four

miles. All the time the Master, who hunted his own hounds, was exercised in his mind as to what it was they were running, for though the young hounds were eager enough, the old ones were decidedly slack. However, they kept running on till "quickly they ran from scent into view" near a farm-house, where the sheep-dog who had done all the mischief took refuge. There was no mistake about it, for there were the marks where the shepherd's shot had peppered him. The wound, however, would not have proved fatal, and he saved himself from the hounds, which, perhaps, would scarcely have killed him had they got up to him ; but he was hanged, and that without delay. And mark, this dog went some miles from home to satisfy his mutton-loving appetite.

It may be thought that hounds would not run a sheep-dog, but I am reminded by the anecdote I have just related of an incident which I once saw with a good pack of foxhounds for which I could never account. We had had an unsatisfactory day, the wind was high and blew from the north-west, and there were frequent squally showers. We had found plenty of foxes, but there had been no scent to speak of, and we were about weary of trying any longer. Most of the field had gone home, luckily, and only some half a score or thereabouts were left when the Master went to try the last covert in his draw, a big woodland which was a sure find. We were not long before we were at work again, dragging about in the big woods without doing much good, and hounds had been dragging on for about half an hour, and every one thought the game was up for the day, when all at once they began to run like fury. And, joy of

joys, they left the big woods and faced the open. Then for about a quarter of an hour they fairly raced, and then we saw they were going to run into something, which just saved its life by jumping over the half door of a cow-house, which one of the farm lads quickly closed. For we had been running a sheep-dog for that quarter of an hour, and a rare gallop it was, I can tell you. Then the Master drew up and addressed the half-score of us who had ridden through the run. "Gentlemen," said he, "there is nothing for you to do but to go home and keep silent." Somehow or other it never oozed out that we had had a good gallop after a dog, and we could never account for the circumstance, and the pack was a particularly steady one.

In the meantime I would advise all those gentlemen who have sheep or lambs destroyed by foxes, *to search for the dog.*

CHAPTER LII

THE TROUBLES OF A MASTER OF HOUNDS

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.—2 *Henry IV.*

MANY are the troubles to which a Master of Hounds is subjected, and it would be easy to fill columns with a list of his grievances. There are troubles with game preservers and shooting tenants, troubles with the farmers at times, troubles with horses and hounds, and troubles with the field. It is with the troubles on the latter score, or perhaps I should say with some of them, that I propose to deal. I have already had something to say about unnecessary damage, so that part of the misdoings of the field can be left for the present. It is with the behaviour of the field on a bad or moderate scenting day, a subject which has been brought home very forcibly to me by the last two or three days I have been out that I wish to deal. Now I think it will be conceded by every one that it is quite possible for a man to be a fair or even a fine horseman, and know little about hunting or hounds, and it may be laid down that at least half of the men that go hunting know and care very little for hounds and their work. What they want is a gallop, and they judge of a run entirely from the standpoint of pace. One would natur-

ally think that a few seasons' experience would teach even these gentlemen some of the rudiments of woodcraft, and that they would for their own sake endeavour to understand some of the simpler matters relating to the hunting of a pack of hounds. But they don't. Season after season they go on, heading foxes and spoiling runs, and when sport is bad, too frequently from their own fault, they blame the Master, or the huntsman, or the hounds. They, mark you, are never in fault, and frequently when remonstrated with, they take it badly.

Perhaps as these gentlemen are "peculiar to no skies," but have their prototypes all over the country, it will be better for me not to name localities, but merely describe what I have seen and heard. We were in a fine country, one in which there are plenty of foxes, and there was a very large field. The morning, however, was anything but propitious; there was a watery white frost and too much sun, and those who could read the signs foresaw that there would be a bad scent. And so there was, and with the first fox hounds could barely own a line at times, so he was soon given up of necessity, and they went to try for a fresh fox. Immediately, certain individuals, eager for a start, got all round the covert, and to make their chance of heading the fox a better one, they carefully got a field away from the covert. A fox was holloed away, and without waiting for hounds, away went half a score bold fellows to the holloa. Then, of course, they had to wait till hounds did come, but the moment they owned the line away they went again, right on their backs. The result, of course, was a check in a field or two.

Some extra big fences gave hounds a chance of settling on to the line, for men had to go round, but the moment they got to them again they rode them off the line. On one occasion at a check, a young gentleman put his horse at some timber, which he jumped after the second attempt, actually jumping into the field into which the huntsman was casting his hounds in front of him. Every time the huntsman had to cast his hounds, and it may readily be imagined that checks occurred more and more frequently, this conduct was repeated, till after an hour and a half's hunting the fox was lost.

Now mark what those gentlemen who caused all the mischief had to say. "It was doosed slow!" "The huntsman was not quick enough!" "Hounds had no perseverance!" Hounds, be it understood, being only mentioned by these gentlemen to blame them, and speeches of similar import. Yet, if it had not been for the unsportsmanlike way in which they had unduly pressed hounds, the moderate sport might have changed into a good hunting run—perhaps into something brilliant. To begin with, the mad scramble for a start lost two or three minutes of valuable time; a good fox is a travelling animal, and he would put a lot of distance between himself and his pursuers in that time. At every check, too, time was lost by the over-eagerness of a portion of the field. Now if hounds had been given a chance, there would have been as good a run as one need wish to see—one certainly above the average. For though scent was catchy and uncertain, hounds did hunt up to the fox, who was viewed only some three fields in front of them about an hour from the

find. Then again, there is the fact that they were able to hunt their fox for an hour and a half, and had only those few minutes been taken advantage of, instead of their being wasted by reckless and unsportsmanlike riding, they would have been nearer their fox.

It is the duty of every man to make himself acquainted with at least some of the rudiments of hunting, if it is his intention to follow hounds. Unless he does so he is sure to do harm unwittingly, and spoil other people's sport as well as his own. A Master of Hounds cannot expect the whole of his following to be past masters in the science of hunting hounds; but he has a right to expect that men will stop when they are told, and will not ride in the huntsman's pocket when he is making his cast on a bad scenting day.

CHAPTER LIII

IMAGINARY GRIEVANCES

Which for things true weeps things imaginary.—*Richard II.*

IT has, I think, been sufficiently laid down that hunting is only possible by the forbearance of the owners and occupiers of land, or, in other words, that there is no legal right for one man to ride over the land which is in the occupation of another. It has been urged with persistency that it is the duty of hunting men to refrain from any unnecessary damage themselves, and as much as lies in their power to prevent others from leaving gates open, breaking down fences when hounds are not running, and riding over young wheats, clovers, and turnips. It has been urged, and very properly, that these are only what may be termed for want of a better phrase, negative courtesies to the farmer, and that the hunting man, if his heart be in the right place, will be more active in his sympathies with the man over whose land he rides, and to whom he owes his sport. He should support the local agricultural shows, he should be ready and willing to aid any and every movement for the advancement of agriculture and the interests of farmers in the country in which he hunts, and he should, where possible, buy his forage and his

horses from the farmers. To do the hunting man justice he is rarely found wanting in these respects, though, of course, there are some ill-conditioned men who evade their responsibilities, just as there are some ill-conditioned farmers who will take all and return nothing. For example, not very long ago a well-known M.F.H., who is always careful to do everything in his power to promote the welfare of the farmers within the limits of his hunt, and who is a liberal subscriber to everything in which farmers have a substantial interest, chanced to be a judge at an agricultural show. He gave his decision in one class against a farmer resident in his own hunt. That the decision was a right one was subsequently proved over and over again, and many good judges wondered why the farmer in question should have shown such a moderate animal. But though a goose, and a bad one at that, in reality, the animal was a veritable swan in its owner's eyes, and he delivered himself of the following speech: "I've always preserved foxes for him," said he, "but when he comes to my covert next season he'll draw it blank." And so the event proved. The farmer had an imaginary grievance, and he vented his wrath on the head of the unfortunate M.F.H., who was totally unconscious of offence, and who had officiated as judge at some inconvenience to please the farmers who formed the bulk of the committee of the Agricultural Society.

This is doubtless an extreme case, but that imaginary grievances do exist in the minds of farmers is but too true. I came across one only the other day as I was returning from hunting. My companion was a farmer, a capital sportsman,

and a rare good fellow, and for a wonder he had a grievance against hunting men, though he did not make a loud complaint. He had, it seems, a four-year-old horse, a well-bred and valuable animal, which he was anxious to sell, and he asked several gentlemen, members of the hunt within the district of which he lived, to come and look at his horse. Not one of them was a purchaser, and eventually he sold his horse to a dealer for the same price, a very large one, which he had asked his hunting friends. He argued that if a dealer could afford to give such a price surely the hunting man could. But this is precisely what the hunting man cannot afford to do. Unfortunately times are changed from the days when men were always on the lookout for a likely four-year-old, and liked to see the talents of two or three promising youngsters developing under the fostering care of accomplished stud groom and rough-rider. The incomes of many hunting men, especially of those whose property principally consists in land, has diminished considerably of late years, and the chances are in favour of contraction rather than expansion. Superfluous horses are therefore no longer to be found in their stables—to use the old adage, “They keep no more cats than catch mice.” It is evident to the most ordinary understanding that a four-year-old horse is not fit to take his turn through a hunting season, and that if he is compelled to do so, the only result would be premature break-down. So clearly is this fact established, that the principal hunter-dealers will not buy a horse under five years old, and many hard-riding men, especially if they be heavy weights, will not buy one under six years old.

This I pointed out to my friend, and his reply was that he had hunted the horse as a three-year-old. I also pointed out to him that a man who was spending his money had a right to get what he wanted, or as nearly what he wanted as possible. To this he agreed, but though silenced I was satisfied that he was not convinced.

With respect to provender, again, how many farmers are there who have old oats, old beans, old hay, and old straw of the quality which a careful and provident horse-owner likes to see in his stable. There are a few in every country, it is true, but their number is soon exhausted, and those who have not the necessary old corn and hay, often assert that new is as good after Christmas, which every practical man knows is not the case, and so find an imaginary grievance. The hunting man should, as much as lies in his power, buy everything he requires from the farmers in the country in which he obtains his sport. That may be laid down as an axiom. But it by no means implies that the farmers should be the sole judges of what he requires. As he has the money to pay he has a right to have the quality of provender and the kind of horse that he wishes to have, and it should be recognised, as it generally is recognised, for happily hunting men and farmers have few misunderstandings, that the obligations under which hunting men and farmers are laid are mutual.

CHAPTER LIV

“OLD JOE”

I WAS surprised to read some time since that if “Old Joe,” who went to hunt Colonel Salkeld’s hounds at Holm Hill in 1842, had a surname it was unknown. Why, every man who has followed hound and horn in Cumberland and Dumfriesshire in the forties and fifties, or who knows anything of the steeplechasing which took place in those sporting counties long before the days of the National Hunt Committee, can tell yarns about old Joe Graham, of Newtown, and relate incidents of his eventful life. For it was an eventful life, and there are few men who commenced their career in the velveteen jacket of a gamekeeper who have risen to the dignity of the scarlet uniform of the huntsman and the silk jacket of the jockey. Yet such was the case with Joe Graham, whose first place was as under keeper to Lord Galloway, under the well-known Bob Cowen. Graham did not stop long in his situation, and he next went to Mr. Hassell, of Dalemair, near Penrith, who then hunted what were known as the Inglewood Hounds. When Mr. Hassell died Major Colomb carried on the country, with Joe as whipper-in, and when Major Colomb died Mr. James Parkin

succeeded him, Joe still keeping his office as first whipper-in.

When Mr. Parkin gave up keeping hounds Joe went to live with a clergyman at Little Salkeld, and whilst there he married. He soon left the service of the clergyman after his marriage and took a sub-contract on the Carlisle and Maryport Railway. This proved remunerative, and with the money he made he commenced a horse-dealing business at Carlisle, dealing principally in coach horses and post horses. When increasing railway accommodation interfered with this trade he took the Willow Holme Flour Mill in partnership with a Mr. F. Simpson. But he always had a keen yearning to get back to hounds, and when he knew that Bob Cowen, his old chief, who was now huntsman to the Cumberland Hounds, which were kennelled at Newtown, was sorely put to it to keep things going on account of scarcity of funds, he threw himself into the work with his characteristic energy, and whipped-in as an amateur, and in many other ways helped to keep the game alive.

Matters had come to a low ebb, and the game was nearly up when Captain Ferguson took the country in hand, and foxes being scarce, he frequently hunted the carted deer. This was a game quite to “Old Joe’s” liking, and he was wont to rattle on in front on an old white horse rejoicing in the name of The Curate, and it took a good one to catch him. After carrying the horn for five years Captain Ferguson gave up, and it was then that Mr. Tom Salkeld, of Holm Hill, took hold. Joe was on his promotion as huntsman, and it is not going too far to say of master and man that they were both “characters” in their way. On one

occasion Joe thought he ought to have an increase of salary, and when he approached the Colonel on the subject he was met with the reply that he thought he had too much salary already, and that he had determined to reduce it by £10 per annum. Joe took the rebuff with the best grace he could, and at the end of the season his master made him a handsome present which more than compensated him for the amount of salary which had been docked.

After Colonel Salkeld had kept the hounds for about four and a half years, Mrs. Salkeld died, and he at once made up his mind to keep hounds no longer, and gave the pack to his trusty servant. No sooner was he possessed of a pack of hounds than Joe determined that it would never do to keep them in idleness a minute longer than was necessary, and he soon had them across the border, and made his headquarters at the "Blue Bell" at Lockerbie, which was kept by an old friend of his whom he had known in his horse-dealing days. Stag-hunting was, of course, out of the question now, but there were plenty of wild foxes in Dumfriesshire, and with these Joe Graham had a lot of fun till the season came to an end. Having once tasted the joys of fox-hunting at the hands of such an expert as Joe, the gentlemen of Dumfriesshire thought it would never do to lose sight of his hounds and him, and consequently a meeting was called, subscriptions were raised, and after arrangements had been made about the hounds, the late Marquis of Queensberry accepted the Mastership and Joe Graham went on as huntsman, kennels being built at Leafield. When the Marquis died, he was succeeded by Mr. Carruthers, of Dormont,

who gave up at the end of the few years, and was succeeded by the present Marquis of Queensberry, who hunted his own hounds. Joe therefore retired from active service for a time, but at the end of three seasons the Marquis resigned, and then, under the Mastership of Mr. Johnstone at first, and afterwards under a committee, Joe Graham resumed the horn, and he hunted the country with credit to himself and to the satisfaction of the subscribers, till at the end of the season of 1879-80 he finally retired from the profession of which he had been so great an ornament. Joe Graham was a fine specimen of the all-round sportsman, a good shot both at pigeons and game, a finished horseman either after hounds or between the flags, and, possessed of a thorough knowledge of woodcraft, he was a popular man indeed in the North Countree. He owned a few racehorses in his time, and his victories on the historical Swifts at Carlisle were not few. Old Joe, the Grand National winner, once belonged to him, but he did not keep him long enough, though once in his day he would have liked nothing better than to have schooled that once erratic animal himself.

Of “Old Joe” as a steeplechase rider, and of his connection with the Turf, I could tell many an anecdote, and perhaps I may recur to his history at some other time. It was as a huntsman that I particularly wished to write of him on this occasion, and I may say in conclusion that the sportsmen of Dumfriesshire erected a monument to him which overlooks the fine valley of Annandale, which he loved so well. It was suggested by an old friend that a gorse covert should be planted near the monument, and perhaps some day this fitting memorial

to an old sportsman may become an accomplished fact. As I write there is hanging on the wall the brush of a fox killed near the monument on an April morning, after a good fifty minutes, and broken up in a thunderstorm.

CHAPTER LV

APRIL HUNTING ; NOW—AND THEN

Back to its icy cave again
Has sped the wintry blast,
And Nature, with a loving smile,
Is waking up at last.

'Tis sweet Spring-tide, and down the vale,
The flowery meads along,
The mountain torrent gently glides,
Singing a quiet song.

But hark ! the din of sylvan war
Is rolling from the woods afar
Upon the peaceful plain ;
And hounds and men are flashing by,
Like meteors in a northern sky,
Till riot seems to reign.

RING-OUZEL, *Baily's Magazine*, May 1866.

THERE are still a few packs of hounds in the North of England which hunt through most of the month of April, and one or two who prolong operations to the month of May, in the hope of killing a May fox ; and very enjoyable is the April hunting, though, at the risk of being added to the number of the *laudatores temporis acti*, I must say that to my mind it is not so enjoyable now as it was under the old conditions.

For the last few years no sooner has the middle

of the month of March been passed than hounds all over the country meet at a later hour—10.30 becomes 11, or 11.30 and 11 become 12, and given a quarter of an hour for stragglers—and whatever hour hounds meet there are always stragglers—it is well on to half-past twelve before the day's work may be said to be really started. Generally, then, even over the hills and moorlands, where alone April hunting can be seen in perfection, the day's sport commences under not very favourable circumstances. There is frequently a hot sun to contend with, and especially is this the case after a sharp white frost. Then the wind at the time of day when hounds are commencing operations in these easy-going times is apt to be troublesome, and sun and wind combined affect scent prejudicially, even on those breezy uplands where scent lies so well as a rule in the spring months. For I have a theory, and it is only a theory, and I do not see how it is capable of absolute proof, that the moors carry a better scent in September and April than they do in any other months of the year. At any rate, it is pleasanter riding over them; the bogs are not quite so boggy as in mid-winter, and many a place which is scarcely passable when the season is at its height rides well enough now. Horses are also in condition, and they require to be in condition to carry a man in the wake of hounds when they cross a moor with a burning scent with a stout hill fox in front of them.

Under the present conditions of April hunting, especially when there exists a good deal of sun and wind, one generally has to wait for the westering sun for the best sport. Then about

five or six o'clock, when our great-grandfathers were beginning to think about supper, a fox may be found that will lead you a merry dance and make a good point before hounds get hold of him, and in all probability you will have plenty to talk about as soon as you wend your homeward way, even if no very big places have tried the jumping powers of your horse. There is nothing, in my opinion, prettier than to see hounds run hard over a moor, and there is one advantage in moor hunting, and that is that they can be seen well a long distance. And well it is that this is so, for I need scarcely say that many a time it is impossible to be on really good terms with them.

The ride home on a fine April evening after a good day's sport is pleasant enough, but it is not so pleasant as the ride to the meet early on an April morning, with the Pleasures of Hope having it all their own way. It is dreadfully old-fashioned, I know, but I must own to preferring 6 A.M. to noon for the hour of meeting when once March is out. The ride on to the fixture on a fine spring morning, when there has been rain during the night and the air is fragrant with the fresh smell of the earth and of budding leaf, is only to be equalled by the ride on an August morning when the sun is making each dewdrop sparkle like a diamond, and you have the whole of a glorious hunting season before you. Yes, it is a pleasant ride enough, and many a time have I jogged on ten or twelve miles to the meet before 6 A.M. in April. By that time a man is generally ready for a second breakfast, and in the countries in which my lot has been cast there was always something substantial in the way of breakfast

when the trysting-place was reached. One of these April hunts I shall never forget. There had been a heavy rain during the preceding night, and it was a glorious "growing morning" as I rode on to the fixture. Not much time was cut to waste over the breakfast, and hounds moved off by 6.30 A.M. or earlier. A moderate fox was found at once, and, not availing himself of the opportunities he had to escape, was killed in a few minutes. Then they began to draw for another, and before long they hit upon the drag of a fox. How beautiful it was to see them working it out, not daring to own it, but feathering on the line, growing keener and keener every moment. Then there came here and there a faint whimper; then, as the line grew more pronounced, an old hound opened, then another, and for about half a mile through the wood they worked in this manner till a cheery burst of music and a holloa from the whipper-in proclaimed that the fox was unkenelled. There was riding enough then, for it was catch them who can as they bustled over a few fields to a big chain of woodlands, through which they ran. For some five-and-twenty minutes they ran at racing pace, sometimes in big woodlands, sometimes over the open, for we were only on the skirt of the moorland as yet. At last they crossed a belt of plantation, and were on the open moor. I can see the fox yet as he rose the hill, some three couples of hounds close at his brush. "Yonder he goes," I said to a friend, as I pointed him out. "Hush," was the reply; "don't speak, but ride." It was wrong, I admit; but ride we did, and what a ride we had! The good hill fox was just in front of

hounds ; sometimes they were viewing him, and we, too, riding for all we knew, one man vainly attempting to keep on terms with us ; the huntsman bringing the bulk of pack on after us, with feelings better imagined than described. On they went, crossing the end of a big wood, and here my friend and I took different roads, to join again as we reached the intakes off another moor, where hounds rolled their fox over after a brilliant hour and ten minutes. And we were all home again at 10 A.M. That was April hunting at its best, and I shall always look on it as one of the best runs I ever saw.

CHAPTER LVI

HUNTER BREEDING

THERE can be no doubt that the future of fox-hunting does depend in a certain measure upon the class of horses that are to be bred in the future, for it is perfectly obvious that if we have not horses which can live with hounds over a country, hunting would lose its charm at once. There are to be found in every country, and their numbers are on the increase every day, men who "ride twenty miles, head the fox, and go home," but though these men swell the field, and though some of them are excellent sportsmen, it can scarcely be expected that they would keep the sport going themselves.

But even if the proposition with which I commenced this article goes a little too far, the breeding of hunters is a subject which must be of paramount importance to every hunting man, and just now there is a good deal of theorising on the subject, and if some of the theories are adopted harm will result and good hunters become even scarcer than they are at present. And as regards the scarcity of hunters, I am inclined to disagree with the pessimists. There is not the slightest doubt that we are better judges of a horse, taken on the average, than were our predecessors. What satis-

fied them does not come up to the standard of perfection required by the wealthy hunting man of to-day. Then again, the demand is much greater. More men hunt, more men have second horses out, and men on the average hunt more frequently than they did a quarter of a century ago, the increased railway facilities doubtless having something to do with this. So that although, as I have said, I am not one of those who preach the decadence of the hunter, it would be folly not to recognise the facts that the supply of really high-class horses scarcely equals the demand.

One thing with respect to hunter breeding which cannot fail to strike an observant man is how men who do not ride are anxious to give the benefit of their advice to men who do. Hence we are inundated with theories about half-bred sires, bone below the knee, and how to breed weight-carriers, every third man one meets having a theory of his own how to breed the latter. And it is not a little curious that heavy men, if they be men who mean going to hounds, never theorise about breeding hunters, but they manage to get hold of horses that can go somehow or other. I fancy that most heavy men will echo the sentiment of the late Major Whyte-Melville, "Give me a thoroughbred horse with brains." Your theorist will tell you that a thoroughbred horse to carry 15 stone is not to be found, which is simply nonsense. Nothing is so sure as that the man who is led away by show-yard standards will find himself "left" when hounds run fast over a big country, and during a pretty long experience I cannot call to mind many horses that made a great name in the show ring and the hunting field.

"I should not class him as a 15 stone horse," said a friend to me once, as he mounted me on a long, low, "old-fashioned" looking horse, 15.3, and a well-bred one, "but he'll carry you, and I think you'll say he is one of the best weight-carriers you ever rode." And at the end of forty minutes I did say so. Yet in the show ring the horse in question would have been deemed hardly up to 13 stone. So, as Mr. Teasdale Hutchinson once pertinently remarked, when asked his advice as to how to breed hunters, "It all depends what you want them to do. If you want them to keep a good place when hounds run fast, you must have them well bred. If you want a horse to ride about the lanes, it does not matter so much."

It is, I know, not a very easy matter to breed weight-carrying hunters of high class, neither is it, for the matter of that, a very easy matter to breed Derby winners. But one thing is very certain, and that is that unless a hunter has a lot of thoroughbred blood he cannot live the pace at which hounds run nowadays. So if it is difficult to lay down a rule as to how to breed a hunter, it is not so difficult to lay down a rule how not to breed one. It may be laid down that a thoroughbred sire is imperative. Of course, I know there is a lot of talk about "making" a breed of hunters, but I fail to see how success can attend efforts in this direction. Wonderful and very plausible accounts have been written to show how hunters will improve in substance with the use of half-bred sires, but so far as I can see, when for generations these so-called hunter sires have been bred, we shall only have a similar class of horse to what we have at present, without his hardihood and vigour.

In breeding from the thoroughbred horse there is always this to be said : You are breeding from a horse whose legs and muscle have been well tried, and it is indisputable that the descendant of generations of merely showyard animals must be soft as compared with the descendant of generations of horses that have been trained and raced. If we want an instance of this we only have to look at the Hackney, who is now practically only a show animal. Look at the normal Hackney as he careers round the ring at the Agricultural Hall. He does not go very long before he begins to tire. Yet at one time the Hackney was the breed of horses on which men rode long journeys. Now, I think it would be quite safe to say that ten miles would satisfy most of them.

The Hackney is the worst possible sire for a hunter, though there have been elaborate theories promulgated in which he has had an important part assigned to him. In the first place there is the lack of stamina, in itself an important matter enough to keep him out of court, one would think. But it is only one count in the indictment against the Hackney stallion. The action of his progeny is rough and uneven, he shakes you terribly, and when he gets a bit beaten you have to carry him, which, it is needless to say, is the reverse of what the process should be. I have seen plenty of horses with Hackney blood in their veins jump well, *i.e.* jump a height, but a drain of any width always brought them to grief, for they are quite unable to "spread" themselves.

The Hackney "boom" has done much harm to hunter breeding in Yorkshire, and the Yorkshiremen who "make" hunters are beholden to

Ireland for quite three-fourths of their horses. The proposed introduction of Hackney stallions into Ireland at the Government expense should therefore meet with determined opposition from all hunting men, for if the Irish hunter breed should suffer as the Yorkshire has done, and there is every reason to think that it will, for the same causes produce the same effects, it will be difficult indeed to find an answer to the question, "Where shall we find our hunters?"

CHAPTER LVII

THE ETHICS OF HUNTING

WHEN the hunting season has come to a close seems a fitting time to review the situation, and to take a look at the relative positions of the Master of the Hounds, his field, subscribers and non-subscribers, and the men over whose land the hunt ride. Not very long ago a gentleman remarked to me, "It is all very well pretending, but as a matter of fact most of us who go out know nothing and care nothing about hound work ; it is the gallop we go for, and the Master ought to recognise that fact." That there is a great deal in my friend's argument from his standpoint I am prepared to admit, but men who argue his way, and take his line of argument as a basis of criticism of the Master and hunt servants, should remember that there is another standpoint, and that is the Master's. He knows well enough that these good gallops which his field are so eager for, and in which he himself is quite as eager to participate, can only be had by careful breeding and management of hounds ; he knows that a harum-scarum policy of galloping on for a fresh fox will spoil his hounds, and he knows that an undue hunting of any one district will cause some ill-feeling on the part of the residents and occupiers of land in

his hunt, and will not be conducive to the general welfare.

I think it would be a good thing if hunting men and hunting women were to look back on the season that is past, and endeavour to remember how many times they have criticised their Master unfairly during the last few months, and how often they have added to the difficulties of his situation by their open-mouthed and ill-timed criticism, and, at times, uncalled-for interference. Of course, it may be said that men hunt a country from many motives, and in some cases the Master of Hounds has been found to be a very round peg in a square hole. But in the majority of instances a Master of Hounds is anxious to show the best sport possible that his country can afford, and he makes many sacrifices both of purse and personal comfort in the attainment of that end. Therefore, even if the Master's methods do not quite commend themselves to his field, they should learn to restrain their criticism within fair limits. One subject on which they freely offer their opinions is the draw, yet this is a subject which the Master and his huntsmen are alone competent to offer an opinion upon, for they alone know all the circumstances which occasion the arrangements, which are not made without due thought and care. How often do we hear the question asked in the latter end of the season, "Why didn't he draw so-and-so?" the questioners quite losing sight of the fact that by so doing another day's draw might be spoiled, or that perhaps a vixen was known to have laid up a litter there. Once during the last season a gentleman asked me why the huntsman was taking us past a lot of big coverts

which he knew to contain plenty of foxes. As there was a gale blowing which was little short of a hurricane, it was pretty evident to the initiated in such matters that the huntsman must have the advantage of the wind if he wished to find a fox that morning. It seems quite a revelation to some people that a fox's senses of smell and hearing are marvellously acute. "What a cast to make!" said, on another occasion, one of the critics; "the fox has never gone there." But "there" was just where he had gone, and some five minutes afterwards, hounds ran into a fox that had been well hunted for upwards of an hour and a half, during half of which time the field, or the majority of them, was actively employed in criticism, not to say invective, in happy ignorance of the beautiful hound-work which was going on under their noses.

In the matter of subscribing and helping the Master generally, now is the time to make good resolutions. Many rich men who get a lot of hunting by no means subscribe in proportion to their incomes, and the hunting got by their guests, their family, or themselves, and poorer men give in far greater proportion for the sport they are able to see. But then, when a poor man subscribes he is generally like the Great Coram Street grocer, "werry keen." This is a thing which should be seen to. I have heard some men speak of the large subscription which certain Masters of Hounds get, but in any good four-days-a-week country £1000 per day is not equal to paying the necessary expenses. Most Masters of Hounds are from £2000 to £3000 per annum out of pocket,—I am speaking, of course, of the larger

and more "fashionable" countries,—and this should not be. It is not necessary that every item of expenditure in connection with the hunt should be paid for by the members, but they should remember that the Master gives a large part of his time to provide them—and, of course, incidentally himself, that must be admitted—with sport, and it is hardly fair that he should be largely fined for so doing.

There are countless ways by which the field can lighten the burden of the Master, which is sometimes a heavy one, for it must be borne in mind that he has to take every one's abuse at times as well as to pay for the privilege. So the least that those who benefit by his labours can do is to render him some little assistance in the way of keeping the occupiers of land on the right side. And to give these gentlemen their due, it is not a very difficult matter if gone about in the right way. What farmers do not like, and it is scarcely likely that they should look on it with favour, is men coming from a distance for their hunting, then quietly ignoring the district in which they obtain their sport for the remainder of the year. People who can afford to go into a strange country with half a dozen or more hunters, and live there from the first day of November to the last day of March, can surely afford to pay a flying visit some time during the summer. They may be assured that they would meet with a hearty welcome, and they would do more good to the hunting cause than they are aware. A timely inquiry about the young colt or the promising bull or heifer to the non-hunting farmer would meet with appreciation, and a visit to the local

cattle show and a few friendly conversations with the farmers there about their stock and their prospects would probably lead to some information about "a rare litter o' cubs in my spinney, and hope you'll come to hunt them, sir." Depend upon it, it is worth the while, nay, more, it is the duty, of every man who hunts to consider how far he may be able to make hunting popular with "all sorts and conditions of men," and to labour in the cause with all his might.

CHAPTER LVIII

FOR NEXT SEASON

“THE king is dead, long live the king,” applies to fox-hunting as well as to most other sublunary matters, and no sooner has the season come to an end than men begin to talk about the prospects of the next. Last week we parted at the edge of a big woodland, after one of those good days on the moors which brighten the closing season, and ere we had reached home the prospects of next season were mentioned more than once. Nor is it only in our thoughts that the next season is touched upon. In every kennel throughout the length and breadth of the land active preparations are being made to carry on the campaign with unabated vigour when the falling leaves once more proclaim that “the summer of our discontent” is at an end, and the horn of the huntsman is again heard in the land.

Perhaps the huntsman has no busier time than in the few weeks which follow close on the hunting season. The puppies will have come in from walk a few weeks before the season closes, and during the time they have been in kennel the huntsman and his assistants will have had their hands full in contending with that fell disease, which seems to attack foxhounds and greyhounds more

severely than any others of the canine race, distemper. Lucky indeed will they have been if with all their care they have not lost some of the best, for, curiously enough, the best hounds generally suffer most from the disease, and it may be added that the sharp spell of cold weather which distinguishes the latter part of March makes the disease all the more difficult to treat successfully.

When the more severe symptoms have yielded to treatment a great deal still remains to be done in restoring health and vigour to hounds enfeebled by a long period of sickness. If any one were to visit a kennel and look at some of the puppies just recovered from distemper, to notice their hollow sunken eyes, their staring coats, their flat sides, and their "wan and woebegone" appearance, they would realise the difficulties which beset the huntsman at, for him, one of the most critical times of the year. The youngsters once restored to their pristine health, and full of vigour and, as a matter of course, mischief, then comes the period of breaking. And in the breaking is the making or marring of a pack of hounds. It is not a mere matter of whipcord, as some seem to think, and in these days the education of hounds is a scientific business. No one who has hunted for many seasons can fail to observe that in all well-regulated kennels there is less rating and less whip-cracking than was wont to be considered necessary in the brave days of old. But this educational process involves a considerable amount of labour on huntsman and whipper-in, labour for which they are not given the credit they deserve by many of the unobservant and careless followers of the sport of kings.

Nor is this the only work which devolves upon the huntsman during these, his easy months, as the ignorant sometimes call them. There are the young puppies to look after, to feed, and get into proper condition to send out to walk ; there are the walks to be selected, and the particular fancies of puppy walkers to receive due consideration. The keepers' dinner, too, is a matter of no small importance. There are keepers and keepers, and many keepers who are friendly to hunting require to be considered when it comes to the moving or non-moving of litters. Of course, the huntsman and his Master would prefer to have litters undisturbed till they go round on the early autumn mornings to teach the young foxes their business. But in some places it may be necessary to remove a litter or two, and this removal necessarily involves a considerable amount of diplomacy. Then there are new keepers to make friends with, and new tenants, both shooting and agricultural, to get in touch with, and altogether every hour finds its work till Peterborough Hound Show brings our huntsman friends together again to compare notes. Then after Peterborough comes the overture in the shape of "long exercise," and then once again will the season of seasons be with us.

In the meantime I would point out that it is scarcely fair to expect the Master and huntsman to do everything during the off months. Every hunting man can and should do something to assist in keeping "the tambourine a-rowling." He should remember that non-hunting farmers feel an interest in agricultural shows, and, "assuming a virtue if he hath it not," he should attend those shows as well

as subscribe to them, and discourse as learnedly as he is able of “prize fat oxen and of sheep.” It is by pulling together that the hunting world goes on harmoniously, and if we continue to pull together, thinking of the tastes of others as well as of our own, the horn of the hunter will be heard in the land for ages yet to come.

CHAPTER LIX

PETERBOROUGH

STANDING out as it does, a beacon to show that another hunting season will quickly be with us, Peterborough Hound Show is heartily welcomed by fox-hunters from John o' Groat's to Land's End. Epsom and Ascot are over, in early countries the corn is, or ought to be, in full ear, and our eyes, which have been wearying for the sight since the parching winds of March and the more or less sunny skies of April brought the last season to an end, are gladdened by a glimpse of red coats and the hounds which we love to follow. Yes, there is no doubt about it, Peterborough Hound Show is the summer festival of the hunting man. Talk not to him when you meet him on the flags at Peterborough of the weights for the next handicap or the delights of the meetings behind the Ditch. All his thoughts are now concentrated on the progeny of Warwickshire Harper, or Tuscan, and on the comparative merits of the young hounds which are giving the judges so much trouble before they can arrive at a decision.

It is, to my thinking, a very satisfactory sign that year after year Peterborough Show increases in popularity. There are old-fashioned people who exclaim against hound shows and everything

thereunto appertaining. Say they, "We have not the sport which we used to have ; hounds are bred entirely for appearance and not for work ; nose is entirely neglected, and 'cry' is thought nothing about. In fact, the show-yard standard is alone considered when breeding hounds." To this I am almost inclined to say with the celebrated Mr. Birchill, "Fudge !"

Let us examine the objections of these critics one by one. In the first place is it true that we have not as good sport now as our ancestors enjoyed ? I am inclined to think, taking the altered circumstances under which hunting is carried on, that we have. Short-running foxes there are, and some of the reasons for this I have already stated ; but short-running foxes are not to be charged to the account of hounds. Given a good stout fox, hounds hunt as well and chase as hard as they did in the earlier years of the century, and the Pools Osiers run with the Warwickshire, and the Melbourne Hall run with the York and Ainsty are worthy of a place beside the great Billesdon Coplow run itself. It may be objected that on these occasions there was a great scent. Granted, but on many and many an occasion in recent seasons I have seen hounds, *when the field would let them*, hunt as closely as beagles when scent served badly—seen them walk up to a fox and then bustle him up for ten minutes, as I have had occasion to relate.¹ As for the question of cry, no one can deny that many packs are very light tongued ; but *pace* the critics, this is not a modern defect. It is many years since Sir Thomas Mostyn hunted the Oxfordshire country, and his

¹ See page 321.

hounds had not much to say to it. I have also been informed that when Mr. Osbaldeston hunted the Burton country his hounds were not distinguished for their cry. This was long before the days of Peterborough. With respect to lightness of tongue, and speaking for the hounds with which I have hunted a good deal, in every instance I have found a great improvement in "cry" in the last twenty years. It is, however, an acknowledged difficulty to keep the "cry" in a pack. That the foxhound is a very inbred animal is an admitted fact, and whether it is on that account, or that it is a reversion to some prepotent ancestor used as a cross, of which no record remains, it is impossible to say. But the fact remains, and it is a difficulty which besets every huntsman in breeding, and it seems scarcely necessary to insist that in woodland countries, and there is a great deal of woodland in most of the hunting countries, cry is a thing which huntsmen cannot do without.

So much for the objections ; now let us look on the other side of the picture and see what hound shows have done for us. The hound show—there have been occasional shows of hounds, but there is only one hound show recognised by hunting men—was originated by Mr. Thomas Parrington in 1859 in connection with the Cleveland Agricultural Society, and was held in connection with that show till 1864, when it was held at the same time as the great Yorkshire show. During the time Mr. Parrington held the Secretaryship of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society the hound show continued to be a movable feast held in connection with the Yorkshire Show, and when in 1877 Mr. Thomas Parrington retired, Mr. Barford got the show to

Peterborough, where it has remained ever since. The hound show has thus lasted forty years.

Now forty years ago, except in a few packs, the questions of straightness, of shoulders, feet, and bone were very little thought of. Even famous provincial packs were a very unlevel lot, and, to use the words of the famous Bramham Moor huntsman, Charles Treadwell, they were all "uncles and aunts and cousins." But now all over the country hounds are more level, straight hounds are to be found in every pack, and the result is that hounds wear better than they did years ago. Of what use, it may be asked, is a hound with the finest of noses if his shoulders are so upright that they give way in his first or second season. I think if I were to be asked what was the best fox-hound I ever saw as a working hound, the hound that entered the readiest and distinguished himself the most during the early weeks of his first season, I should name Bluecap, a hound whose pedigree I forget. Bluecap came of a good strain; he was well ribbed, had good loins and quarters and plenty of bone, but—his shoulders were upright. He took to his work the first day he was out and ran well at head, indeed he and a three-season hunter were one or other of them always with the lead, and it was a sight to see how Bluecap drove on after his fox down the steep hill-sides of the rough country in which he first was introduced to the business of his life, and he was absolutely the first to take the fox. Next time I was out I asked for Bluecap, and was told he was slightly lame, and by Christmas he was a cripple, and as such condemned. I begged for his life, took him home with me, and with the rest and the liberty he

gradually grew sounder, and he joined the pack again when his second cub-hunting season came round. But long before the season was over he broke down irretrievably and was destroyed.

Now before the time of the hound shows there were far more cases of this sort in provincial packs than there have been since, and the gradual improvement in hounds all over the country is—not in all respects, perhaps, but at any rate in some respects—due to the influence of hound shows.

Peterborough is a pleasant reunion, and it is interesting, if you chance to be admitted to the privilege, to listen to the huntsman in uniform and the huntsman in mufti as they exchange notes about the hounds they have before them, or relate incidents which have happened in the hunting field during the last season. It will go hard if you do not learn something worth knowing respecting the ways of the fox or the instincts of the hound if you should chance to listen to a conversation amongst those experts. At any rate that has been my experience, and I was present at the second hound show, and have attended a great many since, not having missed one for several years.

The social side of the Peterborough show is also especially pleasant to the hunting man, who is generally a social being. He meets his friends from a distance; he compares notes with them, and he makes arrangements for the forthcoming season, receiving and giving invitations to “come and have a look at our country.”

Yes, Peterborough is essentially one feature of the fox-hunter's year. It has its educational and its pleasure side, and we could not do without it.

But we do not want a multiplication of hound shows. Huntsmen have something else to do than to go round the country "pot hunting." They have no time to devote to getting hounds ready for a show with a date before the Peterborough gathering, and by the time they get home from it it is about time they were beginning with the long exercise, if they want to have their hounds fit for the early cubbing.

There is only one Peterborough, and we have not room for more.

CHAPTER LX

THE FUTURE OF FOX-HUNTING

Perish the thought, may the day never come
When the gorse is uprooted, the foxhound is dumb.

THE pessimist says that for fox-hunting there is no future, that fox-hunting is doomed, and that in a few years the horn of the hunter will no longer be heard in the land. Foxes, says he, are scarcer than ever, over-preservation of game is more rife than ever, and if hunting is to continue it will be the hunting of the carted deer or the strong-smelling but unsatisfactory red herring. This, I take it, is about tantamount to saying that hunting as it has been known in these islands for upwards of a couple of centuries will cease to exist.

Now I am not a pessimist ; I do not in my heart of hearts think that hunting is on its last legs. I think it will last my time, and very much longer, and I hope that a hundred years hence Barkby Holt and John o' Gaunt's, Askham Bog and Court House Spring, Bilbrough Gorse and Rougemont Carr will echo the merry notes of horn and hound as they do now.

But the pessimist is often a man who has a shrewd idea of how things are tending, and the

mistake he makes is that he takes a tendency for an accomplished fact, and though I hold the opinion that fox-hunting was never stronger than it is at present, I cannot get away from the fact that a danger to fox-hunting exists in many places. But it is a danger which, if tackled in the right way, can easily be surmounted. Similar danger has beset the noble sport in times gone by, and it has been overcome.

I take it that no one—save a few ill-conditioned brutes and some faddists, who think to crush the sporting instincts which are the survival of centuries with a little vulgar invective and false logic—no one wishes to have fox-hunting done away with altogether. Men may have ideas as to how many foxes they ought to have on their estates; if they be shooting men they may think they can have that number, and there will be no harm done, but I cannot think that there is any man aspiring to the name of gentleman who allows hounds to draw his coverts, and yet who does all in his power to destroy foxes, and to spoil the sport of the men he calls his friends. Yet, notwithstanding this, there is no getting away from the fact that there is a scarcity of foxes which should not exist, and that this scarcity of foxes is in the main due to the over-preservation of game.

In many countries in which I have hunted—countries admirably adapted for foxes, and where foxes should have been running about in all directions in the cub-hunting season—there was a marked scarcity, and on more than one opening day hounds drew covert after covert without there being the sign of a fox. A continuance of this—“ill-luck” shall I call it?—can only have one

termination. Country gentlemen who want the sport and visitors who come to hunt will go where they can get it, and some countries which have hitherto had a reputation second only to the Shires, will be hunted in very different fashion—if at all. What this would mean to a rural population, already harassed by low prices, it is difficult to calculate; but I may say that no one knows the amount of money circulated in a good hunting country, and that it amounts to more thousands per annum than outsiders would think it does hundreds.

And I cannot but think that the only reason for the scarcity of foxes which prevails in some parts is due to nothing but the over-preservation of game, or the desire to over-preserve game, which is, perhaps, another thing. A man has coverts which would carry 200 pheasants well, but he wants to have 400, and tells his keepers so. He overstocks his coverts—Mr. Keeper, perhaps, takes a few for himself—and when the day of the big shoot comes there is nothing like the show the master expects, and the keeper tells him that it is all “they blessed foxes.” Then says the master, “Don’t keep too many foxes, Velveteens. I don’t want the coverts drawing blank, but have foxes in moderation.” At which Velveteens puts his tongue in his cheek, and the last fox on the estate is “molested.” What causes the scarcity of foxes is meddling with them in the breeding season, and until this is put a stop to foxes will continue to be scarce. A keeper of my acquaintance, who has a wide experience, and who has always plenty of foxes on the estate under his charge, and an infinitely better head of game than is to be found on

estates where foxes are scarce, holds that there is no difficulty in having foxes and pheasants; it is only a little extra trouble in the nesting season, and till the birds can roost. Indeed, he says that really there is no extra trouble, for there are more dangerous enemies to young pheasants than foxes. An instance of this is given in the *Field* of 21st November 1896. A gentleman who owns six coverts of an average of five acres each, reared in 1895 180 pheasants. Hounds were allowed to draw the coverts when necessary, and there was a litter of cubs in them. In the first shoot 117 pheasants were killed; in the second 11 were killed, hens being allowed to escape. I fancy this is a better average of birds to hand than falls to the lot of the man who preserves extravagantly; and with the pheasants there were the foxes, for hounds drew the coverts seven weeks in succession, and only once drew them blank.

There is another phase of the question which game-preservers would do well to consider. Over-preservation of game will not be allowed to continue long. With farming in its present depressed condition, the farmer is not likely to put up with his land being overstocked with game. A legitimate quantity of game he will be glad to see, but 400 pheasants where 200 should be will not unnaturally set up his back. And it may be laid down as a certainty that if fox-hunting goes down, game preserving will not survive it long.

But I do not expect to see fox-hunting die out. As I have said, it will last my time and longer. What I do expect to see is a better understanding

of what is due from the game-preservee to the fox-hunter, and the two sports go on together in the future as they have done in the past, with a little breeze, perhaps, now and again, but, as a rule, with that amity which should exist between sportsmen, whatever the branch of sport they follow.

CHAPTER LXI

THE HUNT DINNER

A dinner of friends.—*Timon of Athens.*

“THE old order changeth for the new,” sang the late Poet Laureate, but there are old things which pass away which are much to be regretted, and the old-fashioned hunt dinner is one of them. How such a good old custom as the hunt dinner came to fall into desuetude is one of those things which it is difficult to understand, and the more especially as we are, as a people, prone to the multiplying of public dinners. But that the old hunt dinner is a thing of the past is certain, as much a thing of the past as the old-fashioned hunt ball, which it would be now impossible to revive. For in the earlier half of the century, when landowners and the leading farmers and tradesmen, and the men who came to stay in the country for the season’s hunting, if any such there were in those days (with the exception, of course, of those who went to the Shires for their sport), joined their forces and patronised the hunt ball, which was got up by the enthusiastic secretary of the hunt, every one knew every one else, there was no trouble or heart-burning about invitations, and pleasant functions were enjoyed which would be scarcely possible

under our more artificial mode of living. But though it may be impossible or even undesirable to revive the old-fashioned hunt ball, a question, by the way, which I do not intend to discuss or even venture an opinion upon, there seems to me to be no reason why the old-fashioned hunt dinner might not be restored to its former place amongst the social functions of a hunt, and that with both pleasure and profit to all concerned.

It has been urged in some quarters that the luncheon at the puppy judging, which has now become an annual occurrence in almost every hunt, well supplies the place of the old hunt dinner. In some respects perhaps it does, but it does not reach so far as the old dinner did, and there seems to me no reason why we should not have both. Certainly the luncheon is better than nothing at all in the way of bringing those who hunt and those who do not together socially, but it cannot be said to effect this purpose so well as the dinner, over which more time is spent, and which is to a certain extent a more ceremonious affair. It will perhaps be urged by some who cast their eye over this page that the hunt dinner still exists, and perhaps it may in some places, though they do not come within my ken, but not so very many years ago the hunt dinner was looked forward to almost everywhere as one of the chief functions of the year, and now I never hear of one. For those exclusive clubs which name themselves after some hunt, and which number but few members, which have a dress uniform, and which dine together once or twice in a year cannot be said to have or give hunt dinners.

In the good old days it was one of the rules of

every hunt that the members should meet and dine once in each year at least, and the rule of one old-established hunt runs as follows, and it is noticeable that it is the first rule on the list :— “That the members of the hunt shall meet and dine twice in each year at the commencement and conclusion of the hunting season, at such times and places as the president shall appoint, giving each member a week’s notice.” It was in the hunt of which I am speaking a rule that every member was to attend the meeting and dinner, and in case of absence he was fined 5s., one half of which went towards the dinner bill, and the other to the funds of the hunt. It was also stipulated that the president should call for the bill two hours after the cloth was drawn. Of course, when the country became more populated, and railways enabled men to get about more, these rules soon became practically of no effect, men of position would not pay the fines, and it was necessary to keep on good terms with them. So the old-fashioned dinner where the “shot” was shared by all who were present became a thing of the past, and I may say that the last occasion of a public dinner at which the bill was divided that I know of was a churchwarden’s dinner after an archidiaconal visitation.

Then came the hunt dinner as I knew it. It was really, so far as the viands were concerned, something better than a high-class market ordinary, and was generally supplied at about 3s. 6d. each. It was a more decorous gathering than its predecessor, men were living in a more decorous age, and the heavy drinking which was present at most social gatherings of a public nature in the latter days of the eighteenth century

entirely disappeared. At the last hunt dinner which I attended—it was one of the most successful and enjoyable, by the way, that I ever was at—the Master was in the chair, and he was supported by a parson, who was as good over a country as he was in the pulpit, and as indefatigable in attending to his parish as he was eloquent ; by the principal landowners in the hunt, all the large farmers and some of the smaller ones, who had tickets sent them gratis, and some of the merchants and tradesmen of the town in which the dinner was held, men who never went hunting themselves, but who had a kindly interest in the sport of their friends and customers. No one who attended that dinner could fail to perceive that it was a source of strength to the hunt, and even to hunting in general. For it is obviously to the interest of hunting that those who do not hunt should have a kindly feeling towards the sport, especially in these days of log-rolling fanatics. At the dinner in question the speeches were to the point and not prosy, the Master gave some sound advice to his followers, “the song, the story, and the merry jest went round,” and there was not a dull minute from the “find to the finish.” In the words of the poet—

Friendship, amidst the jolly throng,
Through generous ardour leads,
And tunes the rustic huntsman's song,
Or tells of former deeds.
And now they fill their glasses high,
While mirth lights every face,
And toast with many a joyful cry,
“The champions of the chase.”

That such gatherings, by the bringing of men

of different classes into friendly intercourse together, with ostensibly one common object, cannot fail to do good to sport, I, for one, believe, and I should certainly like to see the old hunt dinner again become one of the leading social functions in every hunting country.

CHAPTER LXII

POINT-TO-POINT RACES

It is difficult to account for the increasing popularity of point-to-point gatherings, but that it is increasing there can be no doubt. From far and wide people flock to the trysting-place when it is announced that this or the other hunt is going to hold its annual meeting; there are always large fields, and the interest taken in the contests is abnormal when it is taken into consideration how little the spectators see of the fun, or for the matter of that hear of it, for a perfectly lucid account of "how they came" is not easy to get from the average point-to-point jockey. Nor is this to his discredit, for it must not be forgotten by his critics that he is riding at a pace to which he is unaccustomed, and that he has nothing but the country in front of him. That the men who ride in the races enjoy their fun I make no doubt, but though I have attended a good many point-to-point meetings in my time, I never could quite see where the fun came in for the spectator. The vague rules, if rules they can be called, which govern the sport are by no means conducive to its benefit. The National Hunt Committee practically refuse to legislate for point-to-point races, for the rules they have made respecting registration

in the calendar, the limiting of the number of races to be run, and the number of flags to be put up can scarcely be called legislation of an active kind. And the consequence is that, popular as point-to-point races are, they could be made still more so were there some properly constituted authority to consolidate the rules, and to see that they are carried out. For abuses are springing up in all directions, and will continue to increase if there is not something done to meet the growing difficulties.

First, then, as to the management of the meetings. It would, I think, be a great pity to alter the general character of these meetings by taking away their *al fresco* character, which, in my mind, is one of their chief charms, and therefore I would strictly adhere to the rule or custom, call it as you will, which says that there shall be no stand or enclosure where admission fees shall be charged. A luncheon tent, at which the members of the hunt can entertain their friends, is quite sufficient erection to put up at a point-to-point meeting. But in other respects a change would be salutary. For instance, why should not the jockeys ride in colours? Is there really any reason why it should be impossible to recognise the various horses in running? I trow there is not, and the fact of the horses being ridden in colours would not in any way detract from the amateur character of the racing. The events might also still be restricted in number, for at such gatherings as these the social aspect is the one that should be most regarded, and a crowded programme, "half-hour time," savours too much of business. But I do not see any reason why the

course should not be chosen so that people can have some chance of seeing the larger portion of the race, including the finish, and in order that this should be accomplished there should be a flagged course.

I now come to another portion of the subject, and that not altogether a pleasant one. At present there is no rule to prevent any one, no matter who he is, from running a horse or riding one in a point-to-point race provided he is qualified by being a member of the hunt under whose auspices it takes place, or a farmer resident within the district of the hunt. Yet I am sorry to say that I have seen more ramps at point-to-point meetings, and more contraventions of the spirit which underlies all racing law, and without which no racing would long be possible, than I have done in a comparatively wide and long experience in the racing world. It may be argued that the monetary interest is not large enough to tempt men to go wrong, that there is little betting, and that therefore every man who runs his horse in the point-to-point races held by his hunt must go straight. Those who believe in such arguments as these may be referred to local flower and poultry shows for examples to the contrary of their belief. I remember on one occasion when a match was the result of a point-to-point race, the owner of one horse expressing himself certain that but for accident he could have won. The match was to be run over four miles of country, and the winner of the previous race was the non-favourite, bookmakers asking for and obtaining odds of 6 to 4. And the non-favourite came in alone, for the favourite, as well mannered a horse as ever wore

bridle, bolted in the middle of a field, refused persistently, and, in a word, was a non-trier. The man who rode him would not have been allowed to get up on any course under the rules, nor would the man who had the management of him have been allowed on one. Yet here no notice was taken of the matter, though so palpable was it to any one with a pair of good glasses and any experience in watching "horses in running," that I offered to lay 100 to 30 on the non-favourite before they had gone a quarter of a mile, and could not find a taker.

It may be said that this was at a match, and that therefore those who made the match were responsible for the people with whom they were dealing, or to put it another way, that this was not a point-to-point gathering in the true sense of the term. Admitted, but for all that it should have been run under some rules which would have enabled the stewards to have punished a wrong-doer. But to go to the more legitimate point-to-point gathering. To begin with, how many are there who do not go the course? I know of one instance where the jockeys were told they might go through the gates they found open. One of the competitors had a friend or two who happened to be near an awkward gate, and somehow those awkward gates flew open at his approach, though it is strange to relate that after he had passed through they somehow closed themselves. That man won; it would have been strange if he had not, and the objection which naturally followed was over-ruled, as the man had not opened the gate himself. Now I would ask would it not have been better and fairer if there had been a

course in every other fence of which there was a flag, so that men would have to keep somewhat together, and it would be easily detected when a man went out of the course. More than either once or twice have I seen men jump in four or five fields from home, after "waiting on their field," *à la* late Tom Oliver, behind a haystack, and run second or third. I cannot say that I have ever heard of the money being claimed under these circumstances, and in one or two instances the man who ran second under such circumstances did not return to scale to weigh in. He got no money directly, it is true, but he got what he wanted; that is, he got it published in the papers that his horse was second in a good field, in a few weeks the circumstances of how he got second are forgotten, and his horse is considerably enhanced in value by a fictitious performance of which the owner does not fail to make good use. There are plenty of other bits of sharp practice done in point-to-point races, of which cognisance should be taken, and which merit more or less severe punishment. Why then should not the Masters of Hounds Committee formulate a few rules with the sanction of the National Hunt Committee, since the latter body does not seem inclined to take the initiative? If this were done, and fines and warnings off possible under their rule, we should soon see point-to-point racing occupy a very much better position in the sporting world than it does at present.

CHAPTER LXIII

THE OPENING DAY OF THE SEASON

Welcome the chase, with its balmy November !
Welcome the colours of scarlet and grey !
Welcome the friends that we meet and remember,
Year after year on our opening day !
Blame me not, reader, nor say I'm romancing :
Phantom-shaped horsemen I seem to discern,
Riding among the gay squadron advancing,
Each one equipped for the chase in his turn.
Close by the side of each sportsman is riding
The shade of some friend who has loved him in chase,
Rousing him, helping him, stirring and guiding,
The hunter who bears him with mettle and race.
W. PHILLPOTTS WILLIAMS.

MOST of us who donned the "war-paint" on the opening day of the season, those of us, I mean, who can look back over the vista of many seasons, felt something of what Mr. Phillpotts Williams has described in such thrilling verse in *Baily's Magazine*, as they jogged along on an old favourite hunter to the "Kirby Gate" of their own country. Yes, the opening day brings back to all but the youngest of us memories, half sweet, half painful ; memories, moreover, of a glorious past. Each field brings some well-remembered incident vividly before us, each fence tells of triumph and disaster, each covert tells of glorious

gallops in the past and of high hopes for the future.

What a merry band we were, it seems but yesterday, that rode along this road a quarter of a century ago, and how thinned are our numbers. One has taken to miserly habits, perhaps, and thinks of nothing but his investments, never a true sportsman this, you would say, even when at his best, and probably you would be right, though we have Miser Elwes as an example of the contrary. Another has taken to politics, unlucky man; many are dead, more have lost their nerve, and with their nerve their liking for the sport. But you who are left, keen as of yore, what a glorious band of brothers are you! ready to have a shy with the young ones yet, and having a little more judgment than the gallant bruisers who are fifteen or twenty years your junior, you not infrequently score off them, to your own delight and their discomfiture. But these said youngsters crowd round you as you ride to covert on the opening morning—that is, if they be of the true hunting stock, anxious to know what took place in the “brave days of old.” To them anecdotes of a bygone day are ever welcome, and they never tire of listening to stories of the prowess of huntsmen, or the doings of Tuneful and Solomon, and others of the heroes of old.

There is, I take it, always something of the holiday character about an opening meet. The carriage element is always greatly in evidence, and at the opening meet you see many people who perhaps never attend another fixture unless it be the last. The Master is never in a hurry on this occasion, and he gives the late ones plenty of law.

Then there is a certain amount of coffee-housing to be done. One man has been salmon-fishing in Norway, and has wonderful tales to relate to an admiring crowd; another has been to Newmarket, and had a capital time, had a pony on the winner of the Cambridgeshire at a long shot, don't you know; whilst another, who has been tempting fortune on the classic Heath, sad to relate, can tell of nothing but a long series of seconds. Men from the moors and forests cannot leave their experiences unrelated to their friends, and here and there may be heard men dilating on the charms of the turnips, or of knocking over rocketers in a warm corner. But, strange to say, though almost every man with whom you exchange greetings has no hesitation in stating that he has been having a good time, one and all seem to be convinced that in the coming few months they are to have a better—in other words, on every man's countenance may be read, as plain as print, “the summer of our discontent has passed.”

Yet the opening day has its anxieties as well as its social pleasure, and it is to be hoped its good gallop. There are doubtful parties to be propitiated, and in this, be it said *passim*, the field might strengthen the Master's hand more than they do. Then again, there are sundry reports from outlying portions of the country, sometimes brought in by residents who have their own ideas as to what is required of the hunt, and who are by no means backward in proffering advice—sturdy, good fellows these, and sportsmen to the backbone, whose views must be met as far as practicable, yet whose rivalries it is not at all times easy to keep from appearing.

One thing which must strike the man who sees an opening meet for the first time is the heartiness of the greeting which men of all ranks and of all opinions greet each other. They have probably nothing in common but the love of hunting, but that love of hunting is a firm bond of fellowship—perhaps it would not be too much to say that it is the firmest which exists. The scholar chats gaily to the man who rarely opens a book; the Radical member for the nearest borough is listening eagerly to the old-fashioned and uncompromising Tory of the old school, who is telling him how hounds raced away from Millby Willow beds last Thursday and rolled their fox over in the open at the end of forty minutes—"A run worthy of the middle of the season, by Jove, sir"; the owner of a choice little stud of racehorses, who has a horse that has a good chance for the Derby, and whose coverts we are going to try, is thinking more anxiously now about the stoutness of his foxes than the staying power of the colt in question, and is discussing the draw with the Master and the huntsman; even the keeper, if he be a good fellow, and a lot of them are good fellows, is relating to a knot of his cronies what a grand show of foxes he has, and how gallantly the young ones all went away the last time hounds were out cubbing. Were it not for this common bond we should many of us never know of the good points of our fellows, and we should miss many a cherished friendship.

But there is no time to moralise; the Master has given the signal. Memories and reflections must give place to the business of the hour, for hounds are already in cover. There is a

whimper which tells that a fox is not far off ; at the corner the whipper-in has viewed him away ; a few sharp staccato notes of the huntsman's horn ; the thunder of galloping horses ; the crash of the first fence, and the splash of water from the wide drain at the far side ; a loose horse or two, and the season has fairly begun. That my readers may look back upon it with satisfaction and pleasure when the pining winds of spring and the hedged-up gap tell us that it draws to a close is my earnest wish.

CHAPTER LXIV

ON HOLLOAING

Holloa ! what storm is this ?—*Titus Andronicus.*

ONE of the curious things in connection with hunting is the morbid desire which many people who know nothing whatever about the subject, have to write about it. Novelists whose ideas of sport are of the most limited description are keen to describe a hunting run in all its infinite variety ; they delight in giving gorgeous but quite inaccurate descriptions of men, horses, and hounds ; the fences their heroes and heroines get over in such easy style would astound Dick Christian himself, and, indeed, the whole thing is done generally in a manner which is essentially ridiculous. It has been said that an eminent modern novelist paid one visit to the Derby, and then considered himself capable of writing a chapter which is practically a dissertation on the Turf ; and probably all that the novelists to whom I allude have seen of hunting has been from a distance and in a carriage. Truly ridiculous are the descriptions which we frequently find in fiction of the king of sports, and in no one particular are these descriptions so ridiculous and so inaccurate as they are on the question of holloas and noise in general.

Hunting in France, we have been told, is, or was, conducted largely on the principle of much holloaing and horn-blowing, so these novelists who would hold a mirror up to nature as seen in the hunting field give us any amount of noise in their descriptions; they seem to think that therein lies the great charm of fox-hunting, and the heroes and heroines and their comrades shout "Yoicks, tally-ho!" and other equally absurd and quite uncalled for holloas with a frequency which must have made the politest of huntsmen use powerful language.

It is a curious thing how an idea gets possession of people respecting any subject of which they have no practical knowledge, and there are many well-meaning citizens who think that fox-hunting mainly consists of making a noise and jumping impossible places.

Fox-hunting is something very different to this, but I am of opinion that though we are not always shouting "Yoicks, tally-ho!" or otherwise making ourselves absurd, in many countries which I have the pleasure of visiting we have far too much holloaing. The tyro in hunting may well lay to heart two anecdotes which are told about the late Sir Tatton Sykes when he hunted the country now presided over by Lord Middleton. On one occasion when a gentleman was holloaing excitedly, Sir Tatton rode up to him and said, "I am much obliged to you for the trouble you are taking, sir, but I pay those men," pointing to Carter and his whippers-in, "to make all the noise." On the other occasion a gentleman who had been halloaing with great perseverance was heard to condemn the hounds for their stupidity

in not coming to his holloa. Sir Tatton overheard him, and crushed him with the rejoinder, "My hounds never take any notice of what foolish people say."

Certainly those who have nothing to do with the hounds should be chary of their voices, and a novice should never speak to hounds under any circumstances. He cannot do any good, and he may do a great deal of harm by attracting their attention. When a fox breaks covert one clear holloa is as good, nay better, than a hundred. The huntsman is on the look-out for it, and in nine cases out of ten he will hear the first holloa. But it is entirely within his discretion whether he goes to the holloa or not—a matter which those who holloa so lustily seem to forget, for they keep on holloaing as if the fox they had seen was the only one in the county, whilst probably the hounds have slipped away with another fox at the other end of the covert, and they are in the happy position of being "left." It is curious that experience does not always teach wisdom in these matters, and that men do not endeavour to watch the whole of the game more than they do.

It cannot be too clearly impressed upon hunting men that during a run they should be especially careful of holloaing, as in a well-stocked country it is very easy to holloa hounds on to a fresh fox. Only long experience and the habit of reckoning up every circumstance which takes place in a run can enable a man to tell a beaten fox with any degree of certainty. Only those who have seen him do it can be made to believe how a good fox will "straighten himself up" when he knows that he is seen. A few seasons ago I had a curious

instance of this. We had had a very hard day, run our first fox to ground after a brilliant fifteen minutes, and killed a second in about the same time. Then we found a third who led us a merry dance of forty-five minutes, the pace being strong all the way, and only about a dozen of us were left out of a large field, when he got into a big wood, which was and is a famous stronghold for foxes. I was standing in a ride when I saw a fox peep out amongst some briars. I did not move, and presently he crossed a small open space and went over the ride as lightly and apparently as fresh as when he had broken covert three-quarters of an hour earlier. Hounds were running hard, and when the huntsman came up to me I said I believed they had changed. "I don't see how they could, sir, they've never been off the line," was his reply, and in another minute we saw the fox when he did not see us, and this time there was no mistake about whether he was the run fox, and hounds soon had hold of him.

Occasionally, when scent serves none too well, hounds may have been running for perhaps upwards of an hour with a fox, and they will then, if they have kept at him, have run him very nearly tired, unless he should be a very good fox indeed. If the country is well stocked with foxes, it is very likely that one, or perhaps more, foxes will have been disturbed, and then it behoves a man to be very careful indeed how he holloas. Better far is it to ride up to Master or huntsman, or one of the other hunt servants, and tell them exactly what he has seen. He should be careful to note both in what direction the fox came from and in what direction he was going, and

every particular about his size, shape, and colour is of importance.

When the huntsman has these facts before him he will be able to form an opinion with some degree of certainty as to whether it is his run fox or not. It should be borne in mind that it is quite possible under the circumstances to which I have alluded for there to be two or three foxes on foot, and if all of them were holloaed at, nothing but confusion would ensue.

Many a fox owes his life to the enthusiasm of some excited follower of the chase. When a fox is beaten the greatest care should be taken not to holloa at him. It sharpens him up at a critical period in the run, to begin with ; he makes a final effort, the holloa gets hounds' heads up, and he is probably left behind. One golden rule there is which should never be broken—*never* holloa at a fox when he is laid down. Silent telegraphy is the only policy to adopt under such circumstances.

I always think that one of the charms of early cub-hunting is the absence of holloaing and the quietness which characterises it, for in a well-regulated establishment there is no wild holloaing whenever a fox is viewed over a ride, simply a "tally-ho, over," to tell that he has gone.

It is curious how some people delight in holloaing at the top of their voices, and the discordant yells with which a fox who shows himself outside a covert is so frequently greeted must make his heart quake, and must be a source of deep vexation to the huntsman.

Now, if that worthy is a noisy man himself, he cannot well blame his field for copying his bad example. I know a huntsman who is really never

silent from "morn to dewy eve." He makes a good deal of noise when drawing, and when he has found his fox, horn and voice are never quiet till he has killed him. I will give him his due, and say that his hounds are in good control, that they come to him freely and without any of that rating which is so grating to the ear of a man who loves the foxhound, and I have been asked how it could matter whether he were silent or noisy when his hounds knew what he meant and obeyed him? Perhaps had he been hunting alone or with a small field it would not have made much matter. But, unfortunately, there was a large field always out with him, and the field, as fields will, took to emulating their huntsman in the way of making a noise. The result was that hounds lost many a fox which they should have killed, and if ever they ran one into a covert which was well supplied there was holloaing at every point of the compass, the huntsman added to the chorus with horn and voice, and the result was a change of foxes.

But to a quiet huntsman incessant holloaing is an annoyance and a hindrance, and I would have my young friends know that a quiet huntsman is by no means necessarily a slow one or even a silent one. A man may be very quiet and yet be very cheery, and a quiet man is always cheery at the right time.

It is curious how opinions change respecting what is the correct thing to do. I can remember some trencher-fed packs in my early boyhood, where every man hunted his own hound, though, of course, there was a nominal huntsman, and many of the field carried a horn. It is needless for me to point out what a sweet confusion

ensued when three or four horns were being blown in more or less discordant fashion, and when each man was cheering on his own hound. That under such conditions good sport was enjoyed upon occasion is not due to the merits of the system ; but good sport they did show, these fine old fellows who hunted with trencher-fed packs, and it was in great measure due to the fact that fields ruled small, and that those who went out had a knowledge of woodcraft which the average hunting man of the present day is deficient in. Soon, however, the superfluous horns were done away with, and I have seen instructions to sportsmen which told that "on no occasion were they to speak to hounds when the huntsman was near."

When hounds find a fox in a thick covert in which there are more foxes than one it is most important that there should be no interference on the part of the public. The huntsman may be trusted to have made all necessary arrangements for the viewing of the fox away, and if his whippers-in are not able to cover the whole of the ground he will have one or two trusty emissaries who will take care that nothing gets away unseen. If a man thinks that the run fox has gone his way and has reason for his belief, he may holloa once ; but he should rarely repeat his holloa. The huntsman in all probability has heard him the first time, and for sundry weighty reasons he may have made up his mind not to come to the holloa. He alone can be the judge, as on him the chief responsibility for the day's sport depends. Holloaing all over the place, and holloaing wildly whenever a fox is seen, is a sure way to spoil sport.

One word as to the holloa itself. "Gone

away," or "Forward away," should be quite sufficient, and the huntsman's or whipper-in's scream, musical when given properly, but frequently horrible from the lips of the amateur, is better left unattempted. It is on record of a famous huntsman who had a most musical voice himself, that he came across an individual who was giving utterance to the most horrible yells, and he straightway told him to desist or he should ride down his throat. There is, however, a good reason for not using the huntsman's scream. It is a signal to hounds. They understand what the huntsman wants them to do from the language he employs, and any attempt people may make to imitate his language only tends to confuse them. So, in one word, as little holloaing as possible, an it please you, my masters !

CHAPTER LXV

REFERRING AGAIN TO POULTRY DAMAGES

NOT very long ago I received a somewhat indignant letter from a man on the subject of poultry damages. He informed me that he had in one year lost poultry to the value of some £7 or £8, that next year he had lost about the same value, and that the year after his losses amounted to about £13. He gave me the particulars of his losses, and I am bound to admit that he did not value his poultry excessively, though in one instance I thought his estimate was rather high. He has thoroughly convinced himself that his losses are occasioned by foxes, and by nothing but foxes. He resides on the borders of a couple of hunts, and has interviewed members of both as to his losses. Two years ago he sent in a claim for damages to one hunt, and was told that it had been forwarded to the Master of the other, and not the slightest notice has been taken of it. He says that he was fond of hunting, and liked seeing the hounds about, but he was a poor man who could not afford to incur such heavy losses, and that therefore he would hereafter "trap, poison, slay, and suffocate," to use his own words, which were, I may add, well emphasised.

Now, assuming that my correspondent's state-

ments are literally correct, he has certainly a grievance, and that no small one. But though he puts down his losses temperately enough, he does not give quite all the information that is needed, and the conclusion at which he arrives is certainly such a one as no sensible and unprejudiced man could countenance. To begin with, it is certainly a heavy loss which the man has had, year after year, and the question naturally arises did he take sufficient care of his poultry in shutting them up. It seems rather out of the common that so many head should have been lost year after year. Foxes, like other carnivora, hunt for their food by night, and though they are very wanton in their mischief when they once get amongst a lot of fowls, they *cannot get amongst a lot of fowls when they are shut up*. I know foxes will on occasion snap up a hen or a duck in broad daylight. I have caught them in the act, but anything like wholesale destruction only takes place when he gets into a hen-house. Foxes are occasionally credited with doing wonderful things. I once lost some poultry—as a matter of fact it was stolen—and the wise policeman whom I interviewed on the subject informed me there were three breeds of foxes in the neighbourhood. When I pointed out to him that the staple of the padlock which fastened the fowl-house was drawn, and asked him whether a fox could do that, he was puzzled.

But to return. In most hunts—indeed, in every hunt I know—there is a poultry fund, but in some cases they are not too well administered, and in the case of a man residing on the borders of two hunts sometimes they are apt to overlook the claims. I have known a man who lived on the

borders of two hunts make no bad thing out of his poultry damages, for he got pay from both hunts till he was found out. The proper way, of course, is for the hunts to divide the damages if they are convinced of the justice of the claim, but in this case, according to my correspondent, his claim has never been investigated.

There is another point also which wants clearing up. Did my correspondent send in his claim at once, as soon as he had discovered his loss? If he did not, there is no one but himself to blame. I need not point out that fictitious claims are sometimes sent in by unscrupulous persons. I know of a case where a claim was made for fifty head of poultry, which were charged at 2s. 9d. each. Fifty head of poultry had certainly been destroyed, but most of them were chickens or ducks about the size of a man's hand, and they had been destroyed by the man's own ferrets, and, of course, he knew it. So it is necessary for men to be cautious in administering the poultry fund.

There is indeed only one way of administering a poultry fund, and that is dividing the country into districts, and appointing a farmer in each district to investigate the claims. The claims should be made as soon as the loss is incurred, and as soon as they have been investigated and found correct they should be paid. There should be no dallying or delay. The putting off and shilly-shallying policy adopted in some hunts aggravates a man more than the loss of his poultry.

But because a Master of Hounds or secretary of one particular hunt has lost, or overlooked, or mislaid a letter, is that any reason why my irate correspondent should "trap, poison, slay, and

suffocate" all the foxes he can come across? I trow not, and I fancy he won't do that just yet, for by his letter he seems to be a good fellow enough. Just imagine what the world would be like if, when a man was slighted by his letters not being answered or attended to, he took the law into his own hands and "trapped, poisoned, and slew" indiscriminately. I should have had a busy time myself of late, for in important matters some of my correspondents thought, or seemed to think, that I was the last person who had a right to know anything. One person had to get tenders for a contract for some work I had to do; he got the tenders and kept them carefully till he saw me, and expected me to come to a decision on the matter in five minutes. I did not slay his Short-horn bull, nor trap his terrier dog, nor suffocate his horse, nor poison his pigs, and what I said does not matter.

My worthy correspondent, for I am sure he is worthy, must take an opportunity of putting his case again to the members of the hunt. Let him speak to the Master on the subject, telling him courteously of his losses and how they were incurred. Let him show that he had taken every reasonable precaution to keep his fowls out of the foxes' reach, and I make no doubt he will be listened to. But whatever he does let him not "trap, poison, slay, suffocate," for that never pays in the long-run in a hunting country, he may take my word.

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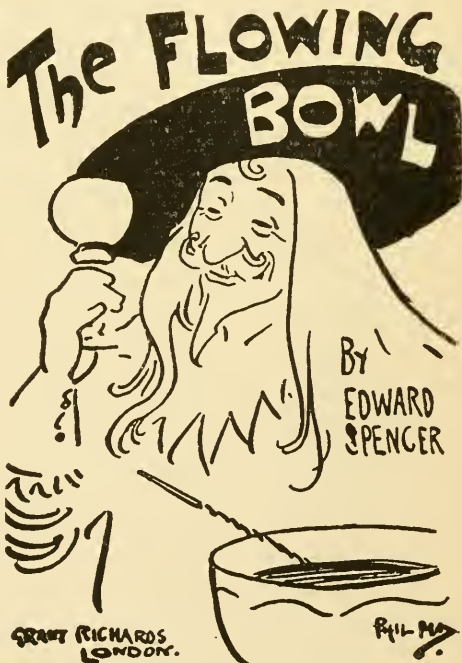
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